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LIBERAL MONISM AND THE CULTURE WAR:
RICHARD J. NEUHAUS AND THE IMPERIAL MORAL SELF

*The public life is mainly about culture and at the heart of culture
is morality, and at the heart of morality is religion.*

Richard J. Neuhaus

The late Richard J. Neuhaus, one of the most important voices in the discussion about the public significance of religion in modern democracies, stood at the very centre of the culture war in America, which has been raging since the sixties. Neuhaus was one of the most prominent public intellectuals – not to be confused with public quasi-intellectual celebrities – of his time, and not only in the United States. A public intellectual in his case meant a rare ability to distil and synthesize many disjoined, often academically intricate, currents of thoughts into a public discourse.

Neuhaus was a civil rights Lutheran pastor activist in the 1960s working within the circle of Martin Luther King for the equality of Black Americans, at a time when the word "civil right activist" did not yet mean a professional lobbying for various groups' rights. One of the great public intellectuals of the 20th century, alongside such figures as Gilbert Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, C.S. Lewis, Reinhold Niebuhr and Vittorio Messori, he was more a publicist and an essayist than a systematic writer and thinker, but as an editor of the very influential "First Things" magazine he truly "moved the culture". A socially and politically radical Christian in the

60s, later in life he became associated with the neoconservative movement and was described as a "theoconservative" – a label he adamantly refused to accept.[1]

A critic of the most repugnant features of the new post-60s liberalism, Neuhaus showed no bitterness towards life or people of even the most opposite views. He knew that modernity was a station in human history in which God placed himself, realizing also the truth expressed by the protagonist of Robert Musil's novel, *The Man Without Qualities*, that one could not be angry with one's own times, without doing damage to oneself. But as a Christian he was Augustinian, conscious of the provisionality of every mundane order, considering it his duty "to subject every mundane political or cultural order to the final judgment of the Kingdom of God".[2] Neuhaus was above all a religious persona, aware that

> […] there was nothing 'ordinary' about the times of our lives, for those lives were all being lived in the time after the Resurrection. We were living, he insisted, at a time when the horizon of our hope has been made secure: for God made clear his answer to the worst that human beings could do by raising Christ from the dead.[3]

Christianity was for him not just one of many diverse world opinions, but a state of mind which transformed the world. Faith was not a private, but a personal affair and thus public as well. And the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus was for him not an idea – it was always a personality. Neuhaus was a public intellectual and celebrity, but he refused to be defined by this phony status. His life was consistently informed by a desire not to be successful, but in fact to be faithful. Ordained

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[1] He once remarked that: "I don't think I'll go along with being called a theocon, not even accepting it with 'a wing and a grin'. To too many, the term inevitably implies theocracy, which is the very opposite of what my friends and I have been contending for all these years. I will never tire of insisting that the alternative to the naked public square is not the sacred public square but the civil public square. The purpose is to renew the liberal democratic tradition by, among other things, opening the public square to the full and civil engagement of the convictions of all citizens, including their religiously informed moral convictions. I am guilty as charged by some conservatives. I am a liberal democrat. For instance, I have argued over decades that the pro-life position is the position of a liberalism that has an inclusive definition of the community, including unborn children, for which we accept common responsibility. Similarly, it is the liberal position to support the right of parents to decide how their children should be educated through vouchers or other instruments of parental choice. On these and many other questions, liberalism was radically redefined beginning in the 1960's, with the ironic result that I and others of like convictions are called conservatives. Our cause is the restoration and renewal of the liberal democratic tradition, which is the greatest political achievement of our civilization. There is yet another and more important reason to decline the 'theocon' label. No political cause and no political order deserves to bear the name of God. That honor is reserved to the Church of Jesus Christ, which its faith and Eucharistic liturgy enacts and anticipates the authentically new politics of the promised kingdom of God. America is a nation under God, but not even at its very best is it God's nation." R. J. Neuhaus. *De-Christianizing America*, "First Things", June–July 2006.

[2] Idem, *Katolicy nie potrafią udowodnić swych racji* [Catholics cannot prove they are right], "Europa", 14, June 2006, p. 11.

[3] G. Weigel, *Multiplying Himself*; and R. L. Wilken, *Evening Prayer, Raymond J. de Sousa in the homily at the funeral mass for Richard John Neuhaus*, printed as *The Great Convivium*, both in "First Things", April 2009, p. 62, 70.

as a Lutheran pastor, he converted to the Catholic Church in 1990, or, as he liked to say, this was not a conversion since he had never left it. Neuhaus was then ordained a Catholic priest in 1991. His impact on the American public theology was considerable, through his incessant public activity and writings and as an editor of an ecumenical and influential journal of religion, culture and public life, "First Things", founded in 1990. Neuhaus was one of the intellectual nerve centres of the – rising in power – network of evangelical and ecumenical Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish orthodox scholars, one of the first to realize that traditional religious divisions in the contemporary United States and in the Western world in general were not so much between religious denominations, not even between religious and non-religious people, but between people of moral gravity and nihilistic persons. Neuhaus was a merciless destroyer of false intellectual pretensions, ideologically motivated public arguments posing as truths and morally dubious pronouncements declared as final moral law. This made him one of the major culture war warriors, even if not by his own choice – both in American society at large, where he battled liberal-left pieties and within Christianity itself, when he challenged the reigning liberal theology.

Neuhaus was aware that he was a warrior in the culture wars or culture war, knowing that the major religious issue of today's world is idolatry. Building bridges between all people of good faith, he reaffirmed his faith in God as an important reminder in the public sphere that nothing could become an idolatrous god, whether it was the modern sovereign state, ideology, or "Gaia", the self-serving ideology of "spirituality". Neuhaus, from his young years in the civil rights movement to opposition to abortion, multiculturalism or affirmative action, was on the barricades of the culture wars. But among the issues which gave him a prominent place at the crossroads of the US public debate was his thesis in the book *The Naked Public Square* published in 1984 that modern liberalism had taken on the form of ideological monism, that it tried to exclude religiously grounded arguments from the public sphere and that this situation threatened the very idea of a free, democratic society. In this context, Neuhaus was critical of the constitutional interpretation by the US Supreme Court and its judicially imposed secularism in America.

Such issues put Neuhaus right in the middle of the culture wars. This was, as he wrote, "our 'culture war', a term I had been using since the late 1970's".[4] It concerned the phenomenon that the major discussions in society were focused not so much on economic problems – however important they may be – but on fundamental and potentially disturbing questions of

> What kind of people are [Americans]? And what kind of people are [Americans] going to be? [For instance] 'culture war's' most visible conflict is abortion, a divide, a conflict of morality in our public life, much more intense than anything we have seen since the nineteenth century conflict over slavery. It's a frightening prospect.[5]

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[4] R. J. Neuhaus, *Bill Clinton and the American Character*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square*, Michigan 2001, p. 130.

[5] *Ibidem*.

And religion was, pointed out Neuhaus, right in the middle of the culture wars, since "the public life is mainly about culture and at the heart of culture is morality, and at the heart of morality is religion".[6] There was also another aspect of the American culture war increasingly felt during the Vietnam War in the 60s, and visible since then. By the turn of the 21st century

[…] a crucial dividing line [as well] in the culture war is between those who do and those who do not agree with the proposition that 'On balance, and considering the alternatives, America is a force for good in the world' [with also] the elements of the left and right coming together in opposition to what is widely recognized as a kind of American imperium in maintaining world order.[7]

Already in 1984, after finally parting with his radical civil rights years, Neuhaus predicted the voices wishing the end of America and thus the end of liberal democracy, in his judgment, tied to the Judeo-Christian anthropology. A decade later he remarked that there were those who said then that the day of liberal democracy is past and there are still some who say it today. Most of those who said it then – in the churches, the universities, and the media held the view that America was 'on the wrong side of history'. But America will continue to be an experiment, and it will continue to be an experiment that is sustained by an intelligent anxiety about what it would mean were it to fail.

Neuhaus ridiculed the idea that the American way of functioning in the world was fighting for an empire. The idea that people would die for the State or for the Fatherland or Motherland is thoroughly alien to the American spirit. The nation is a "thin" community whose chief function is to protect the "denser" communities of deeper allegiance.[8] For Neuhaus, the use of the term "culture wars" was "dangerously inflammatory", but he thought it was a

[…] useable and useful term. It should not [yet] be used in a way that precludes the conversation and persuasion that should be, but is not, the ordinary mode of public discourse. The prestige media are generally blind to their belligerency in the culture war; they champion as courageous the exercise of free speech that is vituperative and slanderous while simultaneously calling for civility, and condemning as uncivil even the measured responses of those who are slandered.[9]

Fundamentally, the culture war was for Neuhaus a war

[…] over the moral definition of American culture. It is the kind of contest with which most politicians are profoundly uncomfortable. The conflict will continue and intensify. America is today engaged in a relentless *Kulturkampf*. We did not start it. It started. We had no choice. It is a war between different ideas about who we are and who we ought to be. In conflict are different story lines for the telling of the American democratic experiment and our place in it. Depending who is telling the story, it seems that there are different Americas at war with one another. Religion plays a prominent part in [this] conflict. The contest is by no means simply one of secularists vs religionists, although both secularists

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[6] R. J. Neuhaus, *Introduction*, *ibidem*, p. VII.

[7] Idem, *1984 Then and Now*, *ibidem*, p. 235–236.

[8] Idem, *America Against Itself: Moral Vision and the Public Order*, Notre Dame 1992, p. 186.

[9] Idem, *The Impertinence of Protesting Aggression*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square…*, p. 183.

and religionists frequently portray it that way. In cultural warfare, the ideas that are most important for all sides are religious in nature, whether or not they are labeled 'religious' ideas. Religion is from Latin *religio*, which means to fasten or tie together. Religion bespeaks that which has the moral force of obligation. The *Kulturkampf* is not, for the most part, one of moralists vs amoralists, a contest relatively clear-cut compared with the [current] situation. Our situation is one of moralities in conflict [thus] it sometimes takes on the character of the 'wars of religion'. Surprising to many is the fact that the conflict now brings Jews and Christians into alliance on many fronts. That is one of the most important developments coming out of the dialogue between Jews and Christians of the [recent decades].[10]

A proper definition of what we call religion is important to the understanding of the culture wars in the Western world today. Culture warfare was sometimes described, Neuhaus observed, as a conflict concerning religion between the bourgeoisie and the new knowledge class, or between "the silent majority and the voluble elites", or – last but not least – between "the moral majority and secular humanists". There was a grain of truth in these descriptions of such confrontations, but even more truth in the statement that it was a war between people.

[…] who are convinced that religion and religiously grounded morality should be publicly normative and those who claim that we are long past the time when any truth, never mind moral truth, can be meaningfully deliberated in public.[11]

The *Kulturkampf* which America had experienced was common to all advanced societies. Nevertheless America was also in this regard different and the religious issue was crucial here, Neuhaus claimed. This religious factor cut across society and was and still is one of the main front lines in the culture wars. There might be a possibility, claimed Neuhaus, "of turning a Kulturkampf into a civil conversation". Religion and religious people – Neuhaus meant transcendental, biblical ones here – have a special task to play in this cultural warfare and point towards a dimension beyond it. It was a crucial activity, wrote Neuhaus in key passages guiding his entire public life,

[…] to challenge the imperiousness of the political, along with all its pretensions and divisive labels. [They] should also challenge the imperiousness of the political. Biblical religion opens us to the worlds beyond everyday reality that we call the world. In this awakened consciousness, all worldly contests of power are sharply relativized, their inflated pretensions to importance debunked. What we in our conspiring and plotting and taking counsel together think is happening, is not what is happening at all. [The problem] today is [that] the great political and ideological divides in our society are not challenged by the churches but run right through the churches. [The] war over the meaning of

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[10] Idem, *America Against Itself…*, p. 165–170, IX–X. Neuhaus was aware that the culture war between the religious America and the non-religious one, had been going on at least since the "Scopes Trial" of 1925, which slowly pushed the "fundamentalists of the early twentieth century [from which] came, in the 1940's, the 'neo-Evangelicals' who were determined to move from isolation to engagement, winning the culture for Christ. [But] a half century later, the result is an amorphous coalition of 'parachurch' movements kept in a state of spiritually adolescent excitements that are exploited by skilled entrepreneurs bent on building their own religious kingdoms". Idem, *While We 're at It*, "First Things", May 2004, p. 70. But that culture war has been on the margins and although still very robust and growing has been incapable on its own of moving culture.

[11] Idem, *America Against Itself…*, p. X.

American culture [is] maddeningly confused, the battle lines sometimes follow the distinctions between liberal and conservative, right and left. Most of [Americans] locate themselves on the battle map. But we are [torn]. We want a place where we can stand with integrity, instead of parceling ourselves out in pieces to one side or another. Communities of religious faith ought to provide such a place. 'Christian' ought to have definitional priority in describing who we are and not intend to be. The same is true of Jews who are Jews not by accidents of Jewishness but by adherence to the truth of Judaism. Religious communities should strive to be a zone of truth in a world of politicized mendacity. In saying that the church should challenge and relativize the imperiousness of the political, the point is not that the church has no interest in the political. On the contrary it is precisely and critically a political contribution of the church to liberate us from the pretensions of the political. A robust skepticism toward the political, an insistence that politics stay in its place, can actually elevate the dignity of politics. What is politics after all? It [is] at its heart, Aristotle said, the activity of free persons deliberating the question of how they ought to order their life together in relation to the good. Politics is [thus] a moral enterprise, not a moral enterprise in the sense that those who practice it always behave morally, [but] that it engages the questions of right and wrong, of good and evil. Politics as a moral enterprise participates in it, but can never be permitted to subsume, our understanding of the moral. Neither, for that matter, can the moral be permitted to subsume the entirety of our lives. Politics should be elevated by being reduced. In the light of Augustine's amendment of Aristotle, the only *polis* deserving of our ultimate devotion is the City of God. Our devotion to the right ordering of the earthly polis is penultimate and, in most of its aspects, prepelnultimate. Christians consider that the church is the community in which the right ordering of that coming Kingdom is proclaimed, celebrated and anticipated in faith sustained by the Living Word. Christians understand themselves to be engaged in the politics of the right ordering of human life together. Any politics that refuses to be humbled by that politics is to be recognized and named as the politics of the Evil One. When it has been duly humbled and has abandoned its overwhelming pretensions to supreme importance, politics can be elevated by admission to the life of the community of faith. It can be admitted on the same basis as any other legitimate concern that some believers are called to pursue. The vocation of the community is to sustain many vocations, and the political vocation is one among the many. It is by no means the most important.[12]

Neuhaus, in delineating "the connections between faith and the public order", was aware that human beings were engaged in

[…] the right ordering of our life together in this provisional period prior to the right ordering of our life together. The beginning of political wisdom is to recognize both the importance and the limits of the political. That, in turn, requires that we recognize the importance and the limits of humanity. Ways of thinking that abandon the reference to what is superior to humanity reduce humanity. When human beings on their own think they are the best thing in the world, they become the most pitiable thing in the world, for they alone of all things in the world are conscious of the threat of meaninglessness. To be sure, those of an existentialist bent take this to be the dignity of humanity, making possible the heroic assertion of meaning in the face of meaninglessness. But clearly this is a case of making a virtue out of desperation. In the classical and biblical traditions, meaning is not of our own contrivance, nor is it our own defiant casting of our meanings into the dark of nothingness. Meaning is bestowed, it is the created ordering of reality, it is there to be recognized and acted upon.[13]

For Neuhaus, thus, the abandonment of the religious perspective made humanity unable to recognize what, above all, were the limits of human reason. The issue was whether theological language was telling us something fundamentally important

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[12] *Ibidem*, p. 14–23.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 23–32.

about the essence of the human condition or whether such language had been over-come by the secular rational Enlightenment narrative. For Neuhaus, biblical theology not only told us something significant about our predicament, but formed a barrier against the hubris of political power as well. He looked at the situation in America from that position.

Neuhaus understood that "the great contest is over culture", engaging all in a reasoned moral conversation about how all should live together. But this conflict over re ligious presence in public life cast doubt on the very unity of common culture, the very language which makes public discourse possible. He thought that

> […] it is not true – as some champions of deviant subcultures contend – there is no longer such a thing as an American culture and that there is only a smorgasbord of subcultures. But it is true that deviancy has been defined down, and in some cases out of existence, making the common culture much thinner. There was a time when the center seemed to hold. Everyone was expected to be aware of what [the common life of a political community]. All of that was a very long time ago. The common culture is now much thinner and, it seems, becoming thinner every day. It has in large part been displaced by what are aptly called the culture wars.[14]

Neuhaus noted that there are religious, or non-religious, thinkers who think they are not captive to the culture wars, but this is difficult since they are pressured by friends or enemies to have a "definite place on the battlefront of the culture wars". This is not

> […] the happiest of circumstances for the public square, or for religion in the public square. Nobody should want culture wars. I am keenly aware that I am viewed as a belligerent, by both friends and enemies. But my allies and I did not initiate hostilities. We did not, to cite but a few obvious examples, declare an unlimited abortion license, or advocate the deconstruction of western culture, or champion the replacement of marriage with state certified friendships. We are playing an aggressive defense, in a reasoned hope of prevailing for the wise to know that, short of the coming of the Kingdom, history is continuing contention. Much better [of course] than culture wars is the idea of democratic engagement that John Courtney Murray described as a people 'locked in civil argument'. While accepting our part in battles not of our choosing, we must never sacrifice hope for genuine argument within the bond of civility.[15]

Neuhaus knew that some Christian intellectuals thought that America had al-ready become a post-Christian society, that engaging in the culture wars was futile and what was necessary in such a situation was to focus on one's ghetto of faith – the idea, for instance, of one of the Methodist theologians, Stanley Hauerwas. But Neu-haus cautioned against

> […] the propensity of some conservatives, especially Evangelicals, to claim that ours is a post-Christian society. That is an easy out from engaging the tasks that are ours in an incorrigibly, confusedly and conflictedly Christian America. It is reasonable to believe that a more churchly and culture-forming shape of Christianity may be in process through efforts such as Evangelicals and Catholics together and new Christian initiatives in philosophy, literature, and the arts. There are, to be sure,

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[14] Idem, *From Common Culture to Culture Wars*, „First Things", May 2004, p. 67.

[15] *Ibidem*.

formidable obstacles, but, if we resist the temptation to resign ourselves to ours being a post-Christian society, such initiatives could bear impressive fruit in the short term of the next hundred years or so. And in the long term, who knows what might happen?[16]

Neuhaus opposed liberal Christianity as more or less consciously contributing to the acedia of the modern mind and its amnesia and radical individualism. Neuhaus, while still a Lutheran pastor, increasingly began to feel that liberal Catholicism, Protestantism or Judaism, apart from professing just social gospel causes of poverty, war, or environment, would soon turn the doctrinal, metaphysical component into some kind of spiritual comfort, a psychology of a communion with the healing, all--embracing God. Its aim was to strengthen, not guide, the inner self-esteem, merging with psychology, a substitute religion. Neuhaus knew that psychology was valuable only when it was based on sound metaphysics, but when it relied on a false philosophy, it was to become not only nonsense but disastrous as well. By being one of the most vocal defenders of Christian orthodoxy, Neuhaus positioned himself at the very centre of a feud within Christian churches, including post Vatican II Catholicism, contributing to a major realignment of the American religious landscape and forming a new religious alliance between orthodox Catholics, Protestants and Jews confronting liberal Christians and Jews. This re-alliance, which resulted in the important manifesto of 1990, "Catholics and Evangelicals Together", a statement of principles which created a Protestant and Catholic Conservative Alliance and ended a long-standing religious, social, cultural and political rift in the United States between Catholics and Protestants, profoundly rearranged religious life in America and itself was a part of one of the major fronts of the culture war.

Apart from a youthful stint with radicalism, Neuhaus remained all his life a liberal democrat in politics, in the traditional sense of the word. He flirted with the idea of liberal democracy as the best regime. But his liberalism was a pre-60s one, when liberalism had not yet turned into a kind of monistic "religion" with definite new anthropology and morality from public life. This new liberalism accepted as its premise the New Left idea of "liberation" from all oppressions. This meant

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[16] Idem, *While We're At It…*, p. 76. Neuhaus quotes an observation of an orthodox theologian, David B. Hart, who wrote that "if we succumb to post-Christian modernity, and the limits of its vision, what then? Most of us will surrender to a passive decay of will and aspiration, perhaps, find fewer reasons to resist as government insinuates itself into the little liberties of the family, continue to seek out hitherto unsuspected insensitivities to denounce and prejudices to extirpate, allow morality to give way to sentimentality; the impetuous among us will attempt to enjoy Balzac, or take up herb gardening, or discover 'issues'; a few dilettantish amoralists will ascertain that everything is permitted and dabble in bestiality or cannibalism; the rest of us will mostly watch television; crime rates will rise more steeply and birthrates fall more precipitously; being the 'last men', we shall think ourselves at the end of history; an occasional sense of the pointlessness of it all will induce in us a certain morose feeling of impotence (but what can one do?), and, in short, we [Americans] shall become Europeans, but without the vestiges of the old civilization ranged about us to soothe our despondency, the vestigial Christianity of the old world presents one with the pathetic spectacle of shape without energy, while the quite robust Christianity of the new world often presents one with the disturbing spectacle of energy without shape".

a war on an entire culture to achieve an ideal of equality with a new anthropology of the autonomous imperial self as a source of morality. It is not entirely clear whether Neuhaus accepted liberal-democracy as the "ideal" system of government or simply accepted it as the best for that time.[17] But he had no doubt that the "liberation" of the 60's and radical secular modernity began to threaten the moral order, and "a free exercise of religion".

For Neuhaus, the culture war meant the end of civilized public deliberations. That is why he didn't mince his words against those who removed themselves from the civilizational circle of moral conversation, branding them "new barbarians", acting on the premise of their imperial self having the legitimacy of law, and refusing a priori to be limited by what we know, the wisdom we have received, and traditional notions of good and evil, right and wrong. Neuhaus was one of those who realized that if we reject universal moral standards independent of the human will and accept the autonomous imperial self as a basis of moral judgment, then the arbitrariness of power is unavoidable. Universal morality grounded in an objective Augustinian standard of divided sovereignty was for Neuhaus a precondition of human freedom. To sustain such a situation one needed a civilized community of moral conversation. Rejecting it and grounding one's actions in the imperial autonomous self would amount to giving power to the strongest. For Neuhaus, there were several conditions necessary for such a conversation in liberal democracy: 1) truth exists as a basis of human reference and is an object of human striving in the public sphere; 2) reason is a tool of such a conversation, and moral reasoning is neither an illusion nor does it deceive us. Thus public philosophy has to ensure: 3) diversity and pluralistic conversation. This approach stemmed for Neuhaus from the essence of American liberalism: the idea expressed in the "Declaration of Independence". Thus the idea of the community in the American tradition was free of any romanticized entities, *a la* Hegel, such as "the State", "the Fatherland" or "the Motherland", and in this situation should also be free of modern day images of one nation under liberal monism grounded in an anthropology of the imperial self, excluding universal morality, freedom and plurality.[18]

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[17] He was here following the Catholic Church's path. The Church wasted a lot of energy trying desperately to resist liberal democracy throughout the 19th century. It was also partially engaged in building an alternative to liberal democracy systems, in Portugal, Spain or Italy. All such attempts ended with authoritarianism. Here the Church failed in Augustinian terms; liberal democracy turned out to be victorious. Leo XIII made timid efforts to accommodate the Church to liberal democracy, but it was Pius XII who in the Christmas proclamation of 1944 finally accepted liberal democracy with which the pope could cooperate well, even if realizing the dangers of such a move. Liberal democracy as a relativized system was anthropologically inimical to Christianity, having a proclivity to reduce any religious system to a Roman cult, but the Church realized it could survive the liberal epoch. It realized it could live with liberal democracy without converting to it, the latter move being made by the majority of the liberal Protestant churches, as well as the liberal wing of Catholicism. Liberal humanitarianism, with Christian *caritas* taken over by the liberal welfare state with a rejection of any serious theological problems could reduce churches to a spiritual department of the liberal state. But the Church was aware of that, despite the fact that the liberal state claimed to be doing the work the Church has been doing inefficiently, that is humanitarian aid.

[18] R. J. Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*..., p. 186. In other words, the American idea of a nation is akin to the Chestertonian remark that " a true soldier fights not for what is in front of him but for what is behind him, not for empire, but for home".

Americans live in diverse communities with diverse "ways of dreaming their dreams" and engaging one another in the civil public square. The public philosophy necessary for that, wrote Neuhaus, was exactly the type which "sustains that diversity". It is a way of people of diverse faiths to "build on what they have in common". The goal is not "a moral Esperanto", a kind of "liberal universalism" with exclusion of other languages. The essence of the contemporary culture war, the totally uncivil moral argument, is that

[…] the proponents of liberal universalism deride other moral languages as 'sectarian'. But there is nothing more sectarian than Esperanto. Nobody speaks universal language. People speak languages. In a pluralistic society we need to be multilingual if we care about the public order. If we know who we are, however, we will know one language to be more our own than any other. The primary language of the Christian, for instance, will be that of scripture, creed, and gospel teaching. It is spoken most fluently and richly in the communities where Christians gather. It can be spoken freely in the public square, where it engages and challenges, and is engaged and challenged by other languages.[19]

The idea of "liberal universalism" is alluring since people fear the "curse of Babel", the consequence of an incessant war of attrition of language against language, faith against faith, one version of good against another. For Neuhaus, allegedly neutral liberal discourse wants to push the ultimate issues beyond the pale of public conversation, imposing only the liberal monistic criteria of discourse. At the same time it brandishes a flag of pluralism, multiculturalism, diversity and tolerance. True democratic pluralism in the case of liberal monism is a formula for anarchy; thus the real discussion is pushed outside the legitimate public square. Robust public conversation should not fear this. Those who would like to impose their own values under "the guise of value-neutrality" evade the question of good and destroy democracy. A political community

[…] is worthy of moral actors only as it engages the question of the good. Against those who fear civil war, the account of human nature offered in the language of some communities assures that, since we are all human, we will have a great deal in common. [There is such a thing as 'human nature' and people who reject such an assumption] fear a conversation based on unhindered communication rooted in the idea of human nature, but if so then all their assumptions about their lives are senseless, they simply slide into the senseless, nihilistic belief in the dictates of the autonomous imperial Self, with dire consequences to their own lives and well being in such an environment. Such people are extremely rare, the rest who do not believe in 'human nature' are simply confused, the more reason to engage them in a meaningful conversation. Human commonalities and a shared experience of living together assure that there will be, at least for public purposes, a significant "overlap" between different moral traditions and languages which express them.[20]

The spheres of such an "overlap" should be encouraged and cultivated, but at the same time, warns Neuhaus, the scope of public purposes "should be limited because the overlap will always be limited". But community and its languages are chiefly about

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[19] *Ibidem*, p. 186.
[20] *Ibidem*, p. 186–187.

[…] the enforceable, and it is the duty of public life to protect them from the rule of public law. Civilization depends upon obedience to the unenforceable. Public life deals with the enforceable because the unenforceable – virtue, honor, discernment, decency, compassion and hope – is ever so much more important, the sphere of law must be limited as much as possible. [For different] reasons that sphere is today expanding. In such a situation, love in the form of justice must attend to those who are most vulnerable to the law when the law is not accountable, and the task requires the engagement of those who have been formed by communities that know a justice better than the justice of which the earthly *polis* is capable.[21]

The threat of anarchy and the expansion of the public law at the expense of the "unenforceable" could be contained, claimed Neuhaus, within properly designed constitutional order. This was so since there was also the

[…] commonality of human reason – the ability to perceive, comprehend, argue, infer, deduce, persuade. The nature of reason is a huge subject on which there would seem to be little agreement. In fact, however, there is a clear distinction between those who do and who do not think there are good reasons to believe in reason. For those who do not believe in reason – the post-Nietzschian nihilists and cultural deconstructionists – public discourse, including dispute over laws and the law, can only be understood in terms of 'the will to power'. [Maybe] such people can be persuaded to reexamine their belief system. Absent that, however, their will to power must be checked by the vibrant and unhindered exercise of democratic pluralism. The threat of anarchy and civil war in such vibrant interaction is reduced by commonalities of human nature, of overlapping languages, of shared experience, of tested institutions, of constitutional order, and of capacity for reason.[22]

For Neuhaus there were two alternatives to a "vibrantly pluralistic public rendering of accounts of the good". The first is the domination of a putatively universal account of the good, which is imposed by the allegedly enlightened and disinterested few. This is, as Neuhaus referred to it, the "sectarianism of Esperanto", a kind of intellectual sleight of hand which has warped political and legal discourse, and which is termed liberal monism, or political correctness in contemporary times. Political correctness, born out of a noble impulse to eliminate offensive and disdainful language, turned quickly into a distinctive ideology of the liberal-left aiming at redefinition of reality, by delegitimization of traditionally used concepts in order to shape human consciousness in the direction of the properly defined aims of the new revolutionaries in search of utopia.[23] Neuhaus described the ideology of political correctness as a

[…] spirit of anti-intellectualism. Public discourse is increasingly [today] aimed not at exploring the truth of a matter but at terminating the discussion. Conversation is displaced by propaganda. Self-described thought police patrol the conceptual borders against ideas and facts they find inconvenient. To be sure, this is hardly new, but the patrol seems to be increasingly aggressive these days. Some arguments are rightly declared to be over. But there are subjects, for example, whether we are facing catastrophic climate change caused by human behavior, whether reason and spirit emerge from mindless

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[21] *Ibidem*.

[22] *Ibidem*, p. 188.

[23] On the concept of political correctness, see an excellent analytical collection of essays by A. Kołakowska, *Wojny kultur i inne wojny*, Warszawa 2010, p. 11–44, 89–98.

matter, whether sexual desire is identity and destiny – that are eminently deserving of intelligent discussion. John Courtney Murray wrote that democracy is made possible by people who accept the open-ended discipline of being 'locked in a civil argument'. This is possible and we must work at it: 'this belief and hope is strengthened when one considers that this dynamic order of reason in man, that clamors for expression with all the imperiousness of law, has its origin and sanction in an eternal order of reason whose fulfillment is the object of God's majestic will'. That is a claim worth arguing about. It is a claim to be confronted by anti-intellectuals who are, with a presumptuousness that would be amusing were it not so deadening, increasingly prone to declaring that the argument is over and that they won. One detects a growing pattern of refusing to engage in argument by declaring that the argument is over. It is not only about global warming [but, for instance] questions about the adequacy of Darwinian theory, whether scientifically or philosophically, [when one must] be prepared to be informed that the argument is over. Offer the evidence that many who once coped with the same-sex desires have turned out, not without difficulty, to be happily married to persons of the opposite sex and you will be told politely – or, more likely, impolitely – that the argument is over. When and where, one might ask, did the argument take place? Who was invited to take part in the argument?[24]

The second alternative to a "vibrantly pluralistic public rendering of accounts of the good" is sheer nihilism, a denial that an account of the good is possible. Neuhaus thought that the liberal, universalist monists seemed to be on the defensive, but that nihilists were full of confidence. There is, of course, no guarantee that "a publicly potent account of the good" is possible. Some think that it might be too late for such a search. Neuhaus pointed out that ours is

[…] a moment of nihilism without the abyss, or at least of only partial descent into the abyss. Perhaps the further descent is inevitable. History is filled with the rise and fall of civilizations, and we have no reason to think that we are immune to the turnings of time. [Thus] we may hope that the abyss is not infinite and we might one day find our way to the other side. But still on this side of the last descent there are laws, institutions, traditions, habits of heart, and capacities of the mind that can hold us back. It

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[24] R. J. Neuhaus, *While We're At It…*, p. 60. Part of this political correctness was the phenomenon of defining certain types of speech as "hate crimes". Neuhaus noticed that crimes motivated by hate have come to be seen as a category of their own in some academic circles as well as by different lobbying groups and media circles. He quips that "it apparently took [them] some time to recognize that few crimes are motivated by love. [But hate crimes have a clear ideological aim]. The admitted purpose of gay agitation for hate crime laws is to have homosexual acts, which in the real world define 'sexual orientation', put on par with religion, race, gender, and age as a legally protected category. There are many good reasons for thinking that a bad idea. But the very idea of 'hate crimes' is highly dubious. Hate is a sin for which people may go to Hell. It is quite another thing to make it a crime for which people should go to jail. The law rightly takes motivation into account but it is not [intent] that makes the killing a crime. A murderer may have nothing personal against someone whom he kills for money. It is generally wrong to disapprove of people because of their religion, race, or gender. But it is not a crime. An exception may be disapproval of someone whose religion includes committing terrorist acts. The purpose of the gay movement and its advocates is to criminalize disapproval of homosexual acts, or at least to establish in law that such disapproval is disapproved. Most Americans, it may safely be assumed, disapprove of homosexual acts. It is not within the competence of the state to declare that they are, for that reason, legally suspect. In a sinful world, sundry hatreds, irrational prejudices, and unjust discriminations abound. The homosexual movement is notable for its venting of hatred against millions of Americans whom it accuses of being 'homophobic'. In whatever form it takes, hatred toward other people must be deplored and condemned. But it is utterly wrongheaded to make hatred illegal". Idem, *Why Hate Crimes Are Wrong*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square…*, p. 172–173.

may be possible to stop the descent and even to gain higher ground. Whether that is possible depends on no other factor so critically as the free and unhindered engagement in public of alternative accounts of a transcendent good by which we should order our life together. Civil discussion of the enforceable might yet be renewed by respect for the unenforceable, upon which the continued existence of the civitas depends. Then again, it really may be too late. There is no sure answer to that, except to say with Eliot, 'For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business'.[25]

The Revolt of the Elites against Liberal Democratic Citizenship

For Neuhaus, the culture war had become a consequence of a phenomenon connected with the cultural left's "long march through the institutions", decided on when the hopes of the worker's revolution failed. This cultural revolution constituted a reversal of the classical Marxist relation between the economic basis and the superstructure. The idea, formulated by Antonio Gramsci in the 1920's, was accepted by the 1968 generation and its gradual influence made the culture war a reality of public life.[26] The first tool of the battle became language itself and a demonization of opponents as people who should be delegitimized in the public sphere, who thwart "progress". Much of the left, as Neuhaus wrote

[…] does believe that conservatives are but the cat's paw of the Gestapo waiting in the wings. Liberals generally speaking hate conservatives. Liberal [left] hatred is directed towards millions of fellow American non-liberals, especially religious ones. It is almost impossible to debate important issues with many liberal spokesmen because opposing the liberal position opens a person to charges of evil: opposition to race- and sex-based affirmative action means one is racist and sexist; opposition to abortion renders one a misogynist; opposition to same-sex marriage means a person is homophobic; and on and on. The loudest shouters belong to the left that has largely succeeded in its 'long march through the institutions'. They have nothing but contempt for the 'process of public deliberation'. How could you trust a public that includes millions upon millions, perhaps even a majority, of conservatives? They elected Reagan, didn't they? There's no telling what they would do next time, if given half a chance.[27]

Neuhaus pointed out that Americans had, since the 60s, experienced a bitter conflict over the public definition of culture and particular social issues and groups that are part of it.[28] But the conflict is much deeper. The culture war touches fundamentally on the very essence of democratic governance and republican thought, because the conflict is connected with a growing oligarchy subverting democracy, the rise of a new, highly educated class of people who consider themselves to be in

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[25] Idem, *America Against Itself*…, p. 188.

[26] On the concept of "the long march" as well as its application in the American context, see R. Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's Changed America*, San Francisco 2000.

[27] R. J. Neuhaus, *Bill Clinton and the American Character*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square*…, p. 152.

[28] Idem, *Ralph Reed's Real Agenda*, "First Things", October 1996, p. 45.

charge of leading a society towards an "emancipated", just future. In the 60s, specific American circumstances created an atmosphere that the country was fundamentally unjust: the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the rise of the college educated intelligentsia, brought up in conditions of affluence and conformism by their parents. This highly educated class of people began to usurp (for themselves) the right to defi-ne the terms of a just society, because they were educated and thus considered them-selves to be morally superior; they acted on a conviction that it was their duty to order a society by means of bureaucratic actions against the majority.[29] A rebellion against this class had to come sooner or later. It was, Neuhaus pointed out, a rebellion of the people against "those with a vested interest in the way things are, and especially for the overclass that has long governed without the consent of the governed". In other words, the culture war could also be described as a reaction against

> […] the revolt of the elites against their own societies, a reaction against a corruption of liberal democracy by the new oligarchy Neuhaus defined as an "overclass". This rebellion of societies against the overclass is going to hurt [them] a great deal, and that is why they use that rebellion as a confirmation of their inner conviction that they battle the forces of evil – defined as populism, reactionary forces etc. – battling the forces of progressive good.[30]

Part of that danger posed by the overclass was their subtle redefinition of li-beral democratic discourse, by means of a new language, soon termed political cor-rectness, in order to prevent open public discussion and ensure a monopoly of the language imposed by it. Political correctness turned out to be a complex mixture of a new language (the only legitimate one), "correct" and "incorrect" attitudes and public statements, "hate speech" and "tolerant speech". It has become the language of political overseers who have taken over "the commanding heights of culture", constituting a moral instrument of governance, aimed at elimination of alternative thinking and action, combined with a hubris that moral right is solely on the side of the politically correct. Essentially a witchcraft-like practice, it attempts to disregard the human condition, the reality of things, propelled by a burning desire for a just, non-oppressive world. The changed language is also aimed at delegitimization of all intermediary institutions creating barriers between the individual and a world which was soon to come, such as family, religion, memory, tradition, nation-state and com-munity at large. This delegitimization of all allegedly oppressive institutions was to leave an individual at the mercy of the new rulers. The latter, on the path to the new society, wanted to redefine reality and push an individual towards an allegedly true source of morality and meaning, i.e. the imperial autonomous self, detached from any previous allegiances. Then the politically correct social causes provided by the overclass would have no competition from previous attachments, allegiances and memory.[31]

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[29] E. J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, New York 2004.

[30] R. J. Neuhaus, *Ralph Reed's Real Agenda…*, p. 45.

[31] The fight for the independence of the mediating structures is thus one of the major fronts of the culture war. The battle against their dissolution as a precondition of a non-oppressive life is a fight

The new class social engineering was to be achieved not only by a politically correct language, but also by the "long march through the institutions", creating a new progressive utopia by the new intelligentsia, the liberators from all kinds of social ills defined by the new elite. This new class is defined by Neuhaus as a class of educated people, the media, university professors, professions, those who transformed themselves into a self-proclaimed and self-serving "overclass". They have become convinced of their high moral probity and act on their alleged sense of moral superiority, reacting with

[…] angry astonishment that anyone should challenge what they declare to be the consensus of the enlightened. [This is, they say] our world, in which [everyone] must become like us. It is the new world of secularism's [which in fact is a world of an] oppressive tolerance of the petty intolerance of its infatuation with tolerance.[32]

Neuhaus distinguishes between the American ruling class and the overclass. The ruling class is a continuation of the old ruling class, which discreetly managed to disguise its role in deference to democratic sensibilities. Since the defeat of the Federalists in 1800, the ruling class has never tried overtly to pretend that it has a "sacred" right to govern America, as the ruling class in Europe has always thought, due to its innate capabilities – intellectual or moral – which might be different from those of the people at large. It has always existed, and

[…] egalitarians' protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, every functional society has a class composed of those who wield concentrated political and economic power and who set its manners, or lack thereof. Within that class, different people do different things, and the most important thing that is done is the minting and marketing of the ideas by which people try to make sense of their lives.[33]

But Americans thought this ruling class to be bearable, for two reasons. First, the privileges of the ruling class were thought to be derived from breeding "natural aristocracy" types; second, such privileges were derived from achievement, through hard work. Since in America class envy has never been a potent factor in public life, such a ruling class has been thought justifiable, while at the very same time testifying to the greatness of America in which everybody can play a game of "equal opportunity". The only condition of such an acceptance was, however, clear: deference to "the people" and ruling in their interests.

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to defend the freedom of the individual and his/her ability not to be at the mercy of anomic economic and social forces. In other words it is a fight to prevent the elevation of that which is possible over that which is real.

[32] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Best of the Public Square*…, p. 127, 113, 111; for a good exposition of the term "new class " being used by neoconservatives, amongst whom Neuhaus is counted, see G. Dorien, *The Neoconservative Revolution: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology*, Philadelphia 1993, p. 96–101, 282–295, 310–311. Dorien shows that the neoconservatives "never settled on a definition of the New Class but [this] did not diminish the concept's polemical force".

[33] R. J. Neuhaus, *Farewell to the Overclass*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square*…, p. 78–79.

For Neuhaus, the "overclass" is an entirely different, new phenomenon in United States history. It exists as a radically isolated sector of the population, at the same time forming an intellectual alliance with the underclass, termed by it as in need of "liberation" from the clutches of the oppressive majority.[34] The latter contains not only the truly economically excluded and those too inept to join society, but also all minorities in general which consider themselves to be excluded by the culturally dominating majority, demanding a realization of their postulates in all spheres against the majority's wishes. This alliance between the overclass and the underclass employs a language of minority rights, increasingly defined as human rights, in order to delegitimize any claims of the community (the majority) to uphold their concept of life.

The concept of human rights thus becomes corrupted in the name of gaining "rights" which in fact means power, money and influence, especially for the self--imposed leaders of the minorities using them for their power game.[35] The overclass is adversarial towards the majority of society, as Neuhaus pointed out, by virtue of ambition, boundless self-esteem and self-importance, as well as a conviction that they represent a true insight into what is just and unjust by the sheer force of their intellect. They also realized that for the first time in human history they were en masse employed by the "prince", the state, as all kinds of "experts" and as such had a stake in power.

The underclass, on the other hand, is adversarial by virtue of social inaptitude and anomie. It is an extremely diversified group, bound by a belief of being outside society. Some are in this class by choice, others by history, and others still due to conditions they want to escape: these people are excluded not due to their desire to get out of a society which they consider corrupted (as in the case of religious people), but excluded by their historical situation, like blacks, or because they have defined themselves as a minority, as in the case of women or some other minorities. Between the overclass and the underclass there is

[…] a fearful symmetry on many scores, but their service to each other is far from equal. Although it goes back before the 60s, the pattern then became more overt by which the overclass exploited the disadvantage of the underclass to greatly expand their own rule. To be fair, they did not think they were exploiting the poor. And, in fact the civil rights movement from the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956 through the rise of the black power movement in the early sixties was a rare instance in which elite advocacy on behalf of the disenfranchised and against entrenched custom enhanced the measure of justice in American life. The civil rights movement was, with considerable right, portrayed as a moment of moral luminosity, and the overclass has been basking in its afterglow for almost forty years. The principle seemed established for a time that the elites possessed their power, and were

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[34] On this alliance between the overclass and the minorities against the majority, as one of the causes of the conservative revolution of the 70s and 80s, see E. J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, New York 1994.

[35] S. Steel, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*, New York 2006; about the feminist establishment: Ch. Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism: How Women Have Betrayed Women*", New York 1994, p. 118–136.

justly ambitious for more power, by virtue of their moral status as champions of the oppressed. The luminosity of that moment, however, was not sufficient to cast the light of moral legitimacy on all the causes that subsequently would be included in the great cause of all causes called Social Justice.[36]

The overclass nominated itself to be a champion of social justice, defined as the end station of a destruction of all forms of life arbitrarily defined as "oppressive" and in need of "liberation" in the name of equality. In time, social justice began to constitute an onslaught on the institutions and practices of American society, encompassing causes which have become major culture war battlefronts. Most Americans rejected a proposal that they were living in an oppressive world, as they had once rejected a proposal that they were to make permanent peace with communism, which they considered evil. They turned out to be resistant to the efforts of the new overclass, claimed Neuhaus, and thus they became, for instance,

[…] decidedly cool to the idea that marriage and motherhood are forms of slavery, deemed the drug culture a pathetic addiction, did not agree that religion in the classroom violated sacred rights, and persisted in viewing homosexuality as a perversion both pitiable and repugnant. They were unattracted by a cultural liberation that brought us crack houses, glory holes, and needle parks; and found themselves unable to follow the logic of replacing, by means of quotas, racial and sexual discrimination with racial and sexual discrimination. Most important, and despite the sustained barrage of decades of propaganda, Americans stubbornly refused to believe that the unlimited license to kill unborn children constituted a great leap forward in [their] understanding of human dignity. As if that were not enough, it had become evident by the 1970s that the social programs issuing from the civil rights movement had turned in very nasty ways upon the very people they were intended to help, resulting in the urban and chiefly black underclass of pathologies unbounded. Clearly, the moral mandate claimed from that now distant moment of luminosity had run out.[37]

Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 was a political signal that that moment of moral luminosity was over. There arose in America, and in fact in all the Western world, two distinct classes that were alienated from the majority of the population and preyed on each other's existence: the overclass and the underclass. The overclass, the cultural hegemonic class, despises the underclass and uses it as a stepping stone for their legitimizing ideology to take up the "just cause" of all "oppressed". In this way, the overclass justifies its moral "highbrow" and its right to be the philosophers of the "prince", the state bureaucracy. The traditional ruling class was not only officially deferential to the people, but its claim to superiority had at least a semblance of paying lip service to meritocratic advancement. But the new overclass has no such basis, while overtly declaring war on their own societies, not even paying lip service to democratic sentiment. What we have experienced is, Neuhaus pointed out, a kind of a "revolt of the elites" against their own societies, with the overclass using the underclass to change the values of the majority and set its cultural patterns.[38] Neuhaus observed that the word "overclass" suggested that the class had an overbearing

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[36] R. J. Neuhaus, *Farewell to the Overclass…*, p. 79.

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 80.

[38] Neuhaus uses the term "the revolt of the elites" after Christopher Lasch's book bearing the same title. Lasch took Ortega de Gasset's observation about the revolt of the masses and noticed that the relationship had now been reversed.

quality, and that is why it could not bear a situation of resistance on the part of the people, the essence of the culture war. The overclass ascribed this challenge to its superiority to a populist revolt by traditionalists, including the so-called "religious right". The overclass

[…] presents itself as being over and against the American people but is quite unable to give any good reasons for its pretensions to superiority. An overclass cannot sustain itself as a ruling class because it offers no argument for its right to rule. Assumed superiority is not an argument. The overclass that emerged from the 1960's deconstructed the moral foundations of its current privilege by its relentless attack on all traditional justifications of privilege. Proponents of permanent revolution are hard put to call for a pause in the revolution in order to allow them to savor their triumph. They cannot recall from the political culture the passions and prejudices which they employed in overthrowing the establishment, and by which they are now being overthrown. Today's movement of populist insurrection is commonly called traditionalist, but it is in large part a continuation of the revolution of the sixties, now directed against the revolutionaries of the overclass who seized the commanding heights of culture.[39]

This revolt of secular elites was especially visible, observed Neuhaus, in their disdain towards religious America. Wanting to play the game of world-class intellectuals, and orienting themselves towards secularized Europe, American intellectuals ignored the fact that America remains an overwhelmingly Christian society. This disdain contributed to this huge gap between the intellectual elite and "the people".[40] The intellectual overclass began to arbitrarily divide Christians into two groups, the progressive ones who were useful, even if deluded, fellow travellers accompanying the progressive "European type" intellectuals into the future, and the deluded ones, consigned to the backwaters of American society, like the fundamentalists. The cultural overclass began to show

[…] aloofness from the embarrassingly religious society [not noticing] that the community of faith [counted] two thirds of the population that is Protestant [or] Christians, which is 90 percent of the people. [Such a class of intellectuals have thought] that we need not bother our heads about matters of interest chiefly to those people. [They have also thought] that there are Christian intellectuals but they are afflicted by a 'survivalist' mentality. That is they seem to want Christianity to survive and flourish. [All in all] the Europeanized American intellectual is [has become] embarrassed by his stubbornly religious country. Thus do those intellectuals who style themselves 'the intellectuals' persist in trying to protect their superior selves from the embarrassment of America.[41]

The overclass disregarded a basic fact, claimed Neuhaus, that "the subject of America and the subject of religion in America are not two subjects but one".[42] This intellectual, secular, anti-religious overclass had no countervailing force on the other side of the culture war. With the demise of the mainline Protestant churches and the rise of liberal Protestantism, which had become, in fact, as Neuhaus observed, just a wishy-washy spiritual department of the liberal welfare state and its "progressive

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[39] Idem, *Farewell to the Overclass*…, p. 81.
[40] Idem, *While We're In*, "First Things", October 2004, p. 91.
[41] "First Things", October 2004, p. 92.
[42] R. J. Neuhaus, *From Common Culture to Culture Wars*, „First Things", May 2004, p. 66.

causes", there were no theologians or Christian intellectuals of real significant force who could influence and move liberal culture as such, "no theologians of great public consequence".[43] For Neuhaus

> […] the absence of such figures is not so puzzling. Among many factors are these: the media--assisted suicide of the religious mainline/oldline; the establishment culture's loss of its defining 'other' in Catholicism and fundamentalism; the emergence and astonishing success of Jewish thinkers in the academy and public culture; fundamentalism's makeover into a perceived political enemy as 'the religious right'; the balkanization of a common culture under the force of sundry multiculturalisms and radical pluralisms; the multiplication of information and entertainment sources such as internet and hundreds of cable channels.[44]

Neuhaus observed, however, that the secular intellectual overclass had been challenged since the 1980's. Americans were railing against such elites located in government, the media and universities, declaring that they "had enough and are not going to take it anymore". That is why such elites had become, observed Neuhaus, entrenched in protective enclaves insulating themselves against an angry population. They formed their own circles, societies, foundations, financial and institutional support networks, and, for instance, think tanks producing papers which corroborated their theses. Such a class talks essentially to itself with shrill cries that "the barbarians are taking over". Such an overclass believes itself to be rebelling against the entrenched elites, but it has itself become such an entrenched elite. Using Harvard as a symbolic figure of such an elite, Neuhaus wrote that it had always been a case of Harvard's class hating America, since

> […] the best and the brightest have always been prone to indulging a measure of contempt for the generality of mankind. The new twist is that America hates Harvard because Harvard despises what Harvard is supposed to represent – scholarship, honesty, and manners worthy of emulation. America is in rebellion against the overclass that has systematically trashed the values by which a ruling class can justly claim the right to rule, which, of course, does not stop many young Americans from wanting to join the overclass, also by way of Harvard.[45]

But the overclass, apart from its incoherent message of anti-elitism in the name of minorities, while at the same time pretending to be an elite in relation to society in general, attempted something new which could not work. Neuhaus recalled Edward Gibbon in this context, who looked at the glory of Rome and, applying his bigotry to his scholarship, blamed "the barbarians and religion" for its demise. The same combination of barbarians and religion, observed Neuhaus, was blamed today for the overclass's decline and impending fall. But both history and common sense suggest that there is no sustainable rule without religious belief, that is any belief in a sense of *religare*, of ideas and traditions that

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[43] *Ibidem*.

[44] *Ibidem*.

[45] Idem, *Farewell to the Overclass…*, p. 82.

[…] bind people together, that evoke the communal adherence we call loyalty. Being itself loyal to nothing, the overclass cannot evoke loyalty. One cannot hold the commanding heights without commanding truths, and it was by the rejection of commanding truths that the overclass seized the heights in the first place. In the absence of truths, or even the possibility of truth, the overclass, led by such as Richard Rorty , wanly sings the praises of 'ironic liberalism', and tries not to notice that the choir gets smaller and smaller. They mint and try to market ideas that no sensible person would want to live by; their cultural coinage is rejected as being backed by nothing – literally nothing, as the debonair nihilists who issue it readily confess, as they incessantly boast. So this is the new thing about the overclass: it does not so much want to rule as to be admired for having exposed the fraudulence of rule. At the same time, of course, it does want to rule. At least, if somebody must rule – and in the nature of things, somebody must – the members of the overclass, while denying in principle anything that might be called the nature of things, has a decided preference for ruling rather than being ruled. Especially if the alternative is the rule of barbarians and religion, meaning the American people.[46]

All rulers in the past used different warrants for their power: the divine rights of kings, the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the dialectic of history. In America, the ruling class, having some similarities to the current overclass, legitimized its rule by the claim that it had to re-educate the commoners in progressive thinking. John Dewey and his followers, who dominated public thinking for half a century , wanted to pull Americans from their religion by means of the allegedly more attractive religion of his "Common Faith of Democracy", presented as

[…] the religion of humanism, only to discover that Americans were incorrigibly attached to the antique truths of Sinai and Calvary. In bitter disillusionment the heirs of Dewey resolved that, if they could not impose their religion, they would expunge religion altogether from our public life, and especially from the schools.[47]

Neuhaus concluded that the overclass, the knowledge class of the new post-modern humanities is riddled with self-doubt today, since "the campaign of liberation from the traditional meanings that give life meaning met with such popular hostility that some of the overclass had second thoughts".[48]

The persistence of religiosity among Americans and the "revolt of the elites" against their own people constituted a new elitism challenging the fundamental constitutional arrangement of self-government. The "New Class" was busy dismantling the moral fabric of society, a new intellectual stance in America, both in relation to religion and in relation to self-government, secularization combined with a paternalistic attitude towards citizens. Neuhaus did not consider this fissure between elites and society as caused by conspiracy. Secularism was an outcome more of a cultural drift than design, a habit of mind, the unconscious inertia of late modernity. But it was also caused by hesitations on the part of religious believers, their failure of imagination, moral nerve, fear, and doubts when it came to professing their own faith as well as a lack of delineation of the boundaries of doctrinal orthodoxy by the

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[46] *Ibidem*, p. 83.

[47] *Ibidem*, p. 84–85.

[48] *Ibidem*, p. 84.

church elites, succumbing to the vaguely expressed sentimentality of humanity at the expense of personal and theological discipline. Nevertheless, he criticized religious people who engaged in politics without articulating their concerns in a dialogical way and those who bemoaned the passing of Christianity, reverting to the "church of the catacombs". This was a betrayal of the Christian mission. The attempt to escape from the world, a perennial Christian heresy, meant that the secular world would set the agenda for the Church and Christianity. His was a call not to let secularists define the signs of the times and convince the Christians, or all religious people, that it was their duty to define the signs of the times. But Christians who tried to ground religious values in the public square had a duty to subject their understanding of these values to public discourse, otherwise they could not build coalitions of people of good, making the public square more "naked". Neuhaus was a consensus builder, while not compromising the fundamental tenets of his convictions. Many times he stated, both in relations to Christian ecumenism and in relation to non-believers, that "tribalism has no place in this discussion".[49]

This revolt of the elites was also caused, observed Neuhaus, by another dogma which the overclass wanted to impose on the populace: a conviction that human life has to be subjected to the rule of experts certified by the overclass – experts not in science, but in the ubiquitous science of life: an attempt to adjust human life by a constant psychotherapeutic overseeing of the incalcitrant population which might commit mistakes when choosing proper conduct of life. This constituted a usurpation of power justified by a quasi-Marxian idea that on the progressive road everything could be defined, predicted and known if only one had a proper understanding of the historical process of which human life is an inescapable part, and which constitutes all that there is to materialistic life. Living life according to experts, against the wisdom of culture, religion and tradition had become the language of the new overclass who, considering themselves to be "experts" in all matters of human existence, could not bear any challenge from the "barbarians", rejecting any reasoned argument contrary to their pieties. A discussion with them was literally useless, a true "culture war" without taking prisoners, since "having given up on [arguing], many are now in revolt against the alleged experts".[50]

The Revolt of the Elites and the Dream of Just World Governance

The rise of this overclass against their own societies reflected another phenomenon, pointed out Neuhaus. The American intellectual elite in the twentieth century "con-

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[49] Idem, *The Public Square…*, p. 90.

[50] Idem, *Farewell to the Overclass…*, p. 83. Neuhaus notes that such "experts" have also wrecked the theology and liturgy of the Catholic Church, recalling here an anecdote circulating among the clergy: "What's the difference between a liturgist and a terrorist? Answer: You can negotiate with a terrorist".

sciously identified itself with a larger arena", meaning a more secularized Europe and the yearning for a universal international justice system established by the cognoscenti, according to their image of world governance. Neuhaus never changed his conviction about the future of liberal democracy and the connection between its fate, and that of America and religion as interconnected phenomena, generally civilizing the world. He wrote that

> […] it makes little difference whether the successor regime is of the right or of the left or unclassifiable. By whatever ideology the idea, this audacious democratic idea, would be declared discredited? By whom, where, under what circumstances, by what conception and what dedication could it ever be tried again? Yes, of course, life would go on and God's purposes will not be defeated, not ultimately. But the world would be a darker and colder place. That it can happen is evident to all but the naïve and willfully blind. That it will happen seems probable, if we refuse to understand the newness, the fragility, the promise, and the demands of religion and democracy in America.[51]

Neuhaus understands liberal democracy in an Augustinian sense, as the best regime at this point in history, which allows the best development of moral conscience, in the absence of an alternative. It is not understood as an ideological regime of citizens who self-create their morality on the basis of the imperial self or as a regime liquidating by political means human earthly alienation – the utopian dream of some proponents of "democratic faith" or the "perfect dialogical regime". One threat to liberal democracy, notes Neuhaus, is still visible at the turn of the 21st century and is itself an important front of the culture war in America and indeed the world. After the defeat of communism, new dangerous utopias were circulating, one of them the utopia of ending national sovereignty and a dream of world government and global democracy.

Neuhaus showed a real animus against this idea of world government and the dreams of the end of national sovereignty in the form of a "humanistic world community". He realized that national sovereignty was not eternal despite the fact that "the sacralized nation state is one of the great idols of modern history". Nevertheless, the legitimacy of contemporary politics is inconceivable outside of the nation state. Nation-states were founded on the premise of the political sovereignty of the people, as in government by consent of the governed. The guardians are guarded by their accountability to the sovereign people of the nation. These ideas of democratic legitimacy are gaining ascendancy in the world, but they do not go unchallenged. Such challenges come from conventional despotisms from the Islamist versions of a divine right to rule, but the challenge also comes from the United Nations, or more precisely, from the forces surrounding the UN known as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's). There are numerous organizations that explicitly contend that the nation state is the enemy, or at least obsolete and an obstacle to global progress. Proposals for transcending the nation state with a world government have been around for centuries, and gained many adherences

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[51] Idem, *The Naked Public Square*, Michigan 1984, p. 264.

following the catastrophic breakup of the world system in World War I. [This] stuff about a worldwide transcendence of differences and the establishment of universal and perpetual peace is fairly called globaloney. Perpetual peace and justice await the coming of the Kingdom, which I fully expect in God's good time, which is not yet. That being said, truth and human nature are ultimately universal, and there do need to be institutions for the accommodation of differences and containment of conflicts.[52]

Neuhaus noticed the strong support the Catholic Church had given the UN from the start, but strategic as well as moral-theological reasons were involved here – an interest in "checking the absolutist claims of national sovereignty". However, the Catholic Church often finds itself allied – notably on population, development, and family issues – with the UN's sharpest critics. Neuhaus considered this drive to replace nation-states with a legitimate world government as crazy, while subjecting the United States and other states to moral criticism for

[…] not providing the UN with the means to fulfill its role as global policeman, global doctor, global tutor, global everything else, [while] NGO's [and some] sovereign nations seek to enhance their importance by curtailing national sovereignty.[53]

Proponents of world governance use Orwellian language, noticeable in many NGO's, in the name of being champions of "civil society". This was bizarre, pointed out Neuhaus, since the whole idea of civil society was to divide the public sphere from the government, in order to make it more accountable to the institutions controlled more directly by the people. There was an obvious mendacity and irony in a view that, in the name of civil society, the NGO's were

[…] determined to expand the scope of government – under the auspices of the UN, its auxiliary organizations, and international law – in a manner that would make government accountable to nobody but the philanthropies that fund them and their own, typically very small membership. The combination of small and middling nations curtailing national sovereignty to enhance their own sense of importance and the NGO's using the idea of civil society to undermine political accountability makes for a fine muddle in trying to understand what is going on. Hundreds and hundreds of NGO's make no bones about their dedication to, well, world government. In the setting of organizational priorities documents, and public advocacy for 'internationally approved' policies, the NGO's have dramatically increased their role in recent years. 'Global Governance and Democracy within the Global State' means that small groups are able to make rules affecting the domestic affairs of countries that it would have been difficult or impossible to achieve democratically in those countries. Global Democracy is, in fact, an end run around democracy. In this respect, the UN-NGO nexus is becoming an instrument as useful to some activists in advancing their causes as are the courts in their own countries. Whether through the UN or through judicial lawmaking, the result is the usurpation of democratic politics. When the NGO's are challenged to who are 'the people' whom they represent, a conventional response is that their goals are the goals the people would choose for themselves if conservative governments and transnational corporations did not hide from them what is good for them, and good for the world. The intention is thoroughly democratic: the UN-NGO combine has such a high estimate of the wisdom of 'the people' that it anticipates the consent of the governed to being governed by those who know best. This is government by anticipatory consent. Admittedly, the people as presently constituted are slow to understand their own interests.[54]

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[52] Idem, *Forget the Bilderbergers*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square…*, p. 222.

[53] *Ibidem*, p. 223–224.

[54] *Ibidem*, p. 225–227.

Such a proliferation of dubious international agreements, agencies and regulations aimed at overriding national sovereignty was for now ineffectual, pointed out Neuhaus, but people in the movement "have big plans and have gained a fair amount of momentum" given to them by another organization, which, having noble intentions, is trying to create itself as a utopian dream spreading outwards: the European Union. Neuhaus devoted a lot of his comments to the utopian consequences of structuring the European Union as a new, advanced form of governance, allegedly transcending the limitations of traditional politics of conflict within the nation state framework and, at least in Europe, attempting to transcend it. It forms a new type of ideology with human rights at its core, escaping history defined as the road to the calamities of the 20th century. The European Union took on the task of being, in the eyes of its elites from the 1968 dominated generation, disappointed by the collapse of the "progressive" Soviet Union, the most "progressive" civilization ever to be. Neuhaus pointed out that all this was being done while creating a federal state of Europe without "the people" controlling the bureaucratic "enlightened" rulers. They nominated themselves, in the tradition of the Enlightenment French intellectual revolutionary elite, as people who know best what real people – in fact in their eyes a despicable mass – want.[55]

"Human rights" ideology is used for this project of world governance, claimed Neuhaus, to prevent any resistance to it. Since human rights as defined by liberal-left democrats are considered to be the only civilized and humanistic politics, the assumption is that people's consent is implicit in letting the policy of human rights' be left to human rights "professionals": the NGO's, international organizations and the European Union promoters of such a culture of rights. But, as Neuhaus wrote

[…] the human rights movement is in trouble because, by its manipulation [by the UN, other international organizations and the European Union] it has lost touch with any constituency that gives it democratic legitimacy. Human rights workers sometimes talk of their movement as an emblem of grassroots democracy. But it is possible to view it as an undemocratic pressure group, accountable to no one but its own members and donors, that wields enormous power and influence. I worry not only about the undemocratic factor but, even more about the way in which human rights are now being exploited as a justification for war [of human intervention]. Such a development reinforces the cynical view that human rights is little more than a slogan invoked to pursue naked interests, for instance, the U.S to justify whatever and whomever Americans can convince to go with them to do what they want.[56]

The major problem thus is that human rights policy, when it takes over political and democratic accountability, may backfire for different reasons. The first is a failure of persuasion, an assumption that the people could „be won over to the globalist push for international courts of justice and other instruments designed to override national sovereignty. That is a very doubtful assumption.[57]

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[55] In the last years of his life, Neuhaus devoted a considerable amount of comment to Europe and its utopian element. See for instance R. J. Neuhaus, *The Exaggerated Death of Europe*, "First Things", May 227, p. 32–38; see also an article of the very intellectually close G. Weigel, *Europe's Problem – and Ours*, "First Things", February 2004, p. 18–25.

[56] R. J. Neuhaus, *Forget the Bilderbergers…*, p. 228–229.

[57] *Ibidem*, p. 229.

The second reason has to do with the aims of the polity, the sources of allegiance and the ultimate legitimacy of a liberal-democratic regime. Neuhaus always stressed the republican character of democracy as a moral community. Republican democracy can exist only when citizens have a sense of a community rooted in history, culture and solidarity of aims. This is not only a temporary solidarity of interest, but a transgenerational community of faith. Only then do people not treat their state as an instrument for realization of particular interests, but see them from the perspective of the community. Transnational world government without *demos* cannot form such a community and the human rights ideology cannot create it either. The third reason why the push for transnational government could backfire is that human rights as a basis of transnational government is wrongly treated as an embodiment of grassroots democracy. But such a policy can function as the ideology of different lobbying groups using human rights rhetoric, and also as an instrument for the perfection of society and human nature as such, an incessant work of ideological improvement, a never-ending story of an elusive utopia. Neuhaus had an acute sense of such a "progressive" potential of human rights doctrine and its use.

Culture Wars Issues

Neuhaus pointed out that at the very centre of culture war conflicts stands the imperial judiciary, which often defines important aspects of public life by fiat, beyond the democratic mandate. He defined this problem as

> […] the most flammable issue in our public life, the usurpation of power by the judiciary. From abortion to doctor assisted suicide to same-sex marriage, the courts have increasingly arrogated to themselves the big decisions about the ordering of our life together, leaving to the people and their elected representatives the relatively trivial questions of raising or lowering the gasoline tax and balancing the budget; the great task is to [again] de-legalize and re-politicize the great questions that are properly political. This will not happen without a very sharp challenge to business as usual – a challenge that some will no doubt condemn as an insurrectionary revolt against 'the law of the land', meaning the latest dumb decisions of the courts.[58]

Abortion

The culture war issue most consistently taken up by Neuhaus was abortion. He looked at the issue from two perspectives: 1) the theology of the covenant, and 2) the liberal theory of the inclusion of the weak within the sphere of moral obligation. Neuhaus used the covenant tradition in an original way. A covenant is "a very troublesome thing", wrote Neuhaus, because it is based on an idea of a promise made and promise keeping (and also promise breaking). But as such it is historical and thus

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[58] Idem, *Ralph Reed's Real Agenda…*, p. 45; the best exposition of Neuhaus's position on the "imperial judiciary" was his "First Things" symposium "The End of Democracy" in 1996.

"vulnerable to the unexpected", unlike, for instance, contract theories of social order which are based on "constants in the human condition rationally ordered and secured by law and habit". Social ills are repaired by social contract logic by rational deals in accordance with enlightened self-interest, and depend on "fixing" the workings of social problems. A covenant is different. It "invokes the metaphors of adventure, pilgrimage and vulnerability to the unknown". Contract theory, pointed out Neuhaus, had been the dominant political theory, associated with Locke's liberal thought. But, for Neuhaus, the present need is "for an emphasis on covenant".[59] The covenant theory was "a necessary corrective" to the secularly accepted contract theories dominating political discussions. During crises of American identity, many of the most persuasive metaphors and concepts useful for change have been "tied to the imagery of covenant", such as experiment, forgiveness, judgment, redemption, atonement, renewal, and they are not abstract but historical categories. They

assume a transcendent point of reference to which we are corporately accountable, and they assume times in which judgement is rendered, forgiveness bestowed, renewal begun and the experiment either vindicated or repudiated. The alternatives to covenant imagery manifest an inherent addiction to the present or to seeking foundation in some past time. Contract theory often implies that human nature is *now* discoverable. Once we have discerned and catalogued its interests, conflict and commonalities, we can order society. [In] contract thinking [where] man as he is is sadly distorted by perverse, irrational social systems, one must reverse to some idealized or hypothetical past to discover man as he *really* is.[60]

In political thought, this conceptual regression is visible both in radical and conservative forms. But whatever the form of this regression, continues Neuhaus, it excludes creative social change and is in fact delusory, meaning not reflecting the true nature of people in history. Neuhuas applies Christian eschatology here to a concrete historical context. The covenant theory is rooted in the Christian theory of original sin. The covenant of God with man saves the latter by providing him with everlasting hope on condition that he is faithful to the covenant, the guarantee of the faithfulness of God. This is, of course, the biblical Yahweh, not an abstract God of the human imagination. Thus if a covenant is seen from this perspective, man and society are

[…] profoundly distorted. [This] perspective [of] judgment is not from some rationally idealized past or present but from a hoped-for future. Man is man becoming. In the debate over abortion, the fetus is often referred to as only potential human beings. The point here is that we are all only potential human beings. God, who is the power of the future, has made a covenant with his creation that he will bring to completion that which he has started. Whatever might be said about the American covenant it must always be understood in the context of this larger covenant. The covenant relevant to America is but a specific instance of that covenant with the creation – just as whatever sense of covenantal accountability each of us may have about his or her own life is worked out, with greater or lesser awareness, within the social reality that is America.[61]

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[59] Idem, *Time Towards Home…*, p. 46.
[60] *Ibidem*, p. 47.
[61] *Ibidem*, p. 47.

The other Neuhaus perspective against abortion is from the liberal theory of inclusion of the weak within the sphere of moral obligation. His opposition to the abortion culture stemmed from his effort to create a public philosophy of common moral obligation. The question not only related to abortion, but a much more profound issue

[…] how we define the community for which we accept common responsibility and provide legal protection. In a society where the strong, the successful, and the healthy increasingly impose their idea of quality of life in order to exclude the mariginal, we do not have even a shared vocabulary for discussing these questions of such great moral moment. In pondering the question: Who is my neighbor? We have in two hundred years descended from speaking of providence to speaking of privacy, from affirming the obligations of community to embracing the technologies of convenience. It may be too late to construct the kind of public philosophy that can restore a shared moral discourse about the meaning of the social experiment of which we are part. But we are not permitted to surrender hope. The church is the community of transcendent hope. Activists and theologians urge us to invest our hopes in temporal struggles, struggles which cannot bear and will inevitably betray those hopes. We are told that people will not give themselves religiously to the political task if that task is viewed as penultimate. And yet our duty is precisely the penultimate, to work in faithfulness to the moment that is ours and in love toward the neighbor whom God has given us. And if we are weary in that work, the answer is a renewal in transcendental faith and love, not the illusion that our work is coterminous with the working of God. The only religion that will help construct the public philosophy that we need is the religion that knows that all of our politics and all of our philosophies are, at best, faint intuitions of the City of God to which we are called. Only such a lively hope as this can prevent our just causes from turning into holy wars and our public philosophies from turning into civil religions.[62]

In a democratic polity, claimed Neuhaus, it was best when conflicts could be resolved without total winners and total losers. To turn such an issue as abortion from the province of a vigorous argument to judicial fiat, as happened when the Supreme Court in "Roe vs Wade" of 1973 made abortion a constitutional right, was suicidal. The pro-choicers

[…] had lost the argument by their stubborn refusal to acknowledge the question of the moral significance and hence the proper legal status of life in its early stages. With that stubborn refusal they set themselves against clear reason and scientific fact – and against moral sensibilities and common sense of most Americans. [Some say that] the culture was moving in a proabortion direction, before the Court moved. This was true of the elite culture of the knowledge class. On abortion, the elite culture took the more democratic culture by surprise. It was a while before the democratic culture was able to organize its response to the attack, but the years following are the story of stunning effective response. That response is the more impressive when we again recall that the prolife cause had arrayed against it every institution of the Establishment in the media, academe, and religion. The only exception was the Roman Catholic Church which, then and now, is thought to be very questionably part of the establishment. [But] many in the elite culture who favored 'abortion reform' in the 1960s were later repulsed by the reality of 1.6 million abortions per year. That, they began to say, was not what they had in mind at all.[63]

For Neuhaus, the powerful resistance to legal changes protecting the unborn was part of the establishment promoting the imperial self as a basis of morality, and

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	[62] Idem, *From Civil Religion to Public Philosophy*, [in:] *Civil Religion and Political Theology*, ed. L. S. Rouner, Notre Dame Il. 1986, p. 108–199.
	[63] Idem, *America Against Itself: Moral Vision and the Public Order*, Notre Dame 1992, p. 165–167.

powerful economic forces had a stake in such a resistance. But the resistance came primarily from the elite culture, mainly because they turned out to be shocked and "bitterly disappointed" that the judicial fiat in the shape of the "Roe vs Wade" decision did not hold, and that a large section of American society showed no sign of giving up opposition to the decision. The result of the Supreme Court decision of 1973 was thus not social peace but, to the contrary,

[…] an intensification of the class-based *Kulturkampf* in which our public life is now embroiled. To call it Kulturkampf is no exaggeration: it is a war over the moral definition of American culture. It is the kind of contest with which most politicians are profoundly uncomfortable. The conflict will continue and intensify. Not fanatically, but quietly, calmly, reflectively, and self-critically, believing Christians and Jews remind one another of the nature of the conflict in which we are engaged, also in the public order. The Christian way of describing what we are up against is framed by Paul: 'For we are not contending against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6). Some who overhear us speaking this way will call it fanaticism. We should not be surprised by that, for fanaticism is the only word some people have for faith. Every moment of history is equally present to God. Every moment is also equally present to great evil. But there are moments in which great evil bestirs itself with intentions that are discernible to those who have eyes to see. Ours is such a moment. Evil, as is its wont, employs the language of the good to disguise its purposes. In this case it is the great good of choice that hides the greater wrong of what is chosen. It is a tempting shrewdly contrived for a free society that has forgotten that freedom depends upon devotion to more than freedom. The tempting is always fit to the times. In all times, however, the response is pretty much the same among those who have eyes to see what is happening and ears to hear the call to resistance. Like those other rescuers, they say: "We did not start it. It started. We had no choice".[64]

Neuhaus feared that such a constitutional "right of abortion" entailed a radical redefinition of what it meant to be a human being. The premises accepted in the abortion debate had already moved into arguments supporting euthanasia, lethal stem-cell research, infanticide of inconvenient children and human cloning. This effort to redefine anthropology and human nature was about what kind of people, Americans and world, we want to be. Neuhaus showed that there was

[…] the profoundly religious conviction driving the great human rights cause of our time, the pro-life movement. As with the segregationists of a half century ago, the pro-abortionists' foundations in American culture are mushy. In time, and given political opportunity to express itself, one reasonably hopes that opinion and convenience will once again be trumped by conviction.[65]

Abortion had turned into a kind of eugenics device eliminating "burdensome" people. The liberal society was fast becoming a society, warned Neuhaus, which had no tolerance for such people, so abortion of defective children is a natural outcome. But there was a sinister twist to such a eugenic rationale for aborting a child. It was claimed that such a child

[…] would be an intolerable burden upon the parents, upon the family, and upon society. Many others simply refuse prenatal screening altogether, or only for the purpose of discovering a problem that

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[64] *Ibidem*, p. 165–170.
[65] Idem, *While We 're at It…*, p. 93.

might be remedied in the womb. Their commitment is to accepting and loving the life entrusted to them. With the return of eugenics, such people are increasingly viewed as antisocial, if not 'outlaws'. The late Christopher Lasch wrote that we congratulate ourselves on our moral progress because we no longer tolerate 'freak shows' at the country fair. The real reason is that we are fast becoming a society that has no tolerance of, no place for 'freaks'. They should never have been allowed to be born. Moral discourse today, especially in the academy, is rife with talk about respecting the 'other'. So long as the other is not so other as to be a burden.[66]

Homosexuality

Homosexuality, Neuhaus realized, had become the most contentious of contemporary issues in the culture war. The gay movement is one of the most powerful lobbying groups aiming at radical cultural and public policy transformation, sharply at odds with traditional morality. Since the Catholic Church has been essentially the only public voice upholding the inviolability of its moral teaching on homosexuality, it has been selected for violent criticism by the gay movement and the entire liberal-left establishment, accepting its anthropology of the imperial self as the only legitimate basis of its private and public morality. They consider homosexuality as just one of (many) "life choices", with the resistance of the Church to such an anthropology defined as an illegitimate subversion. Neuhaus observed that the discussion about homosexuality lacked any nuance, making it difficult to focus on intricate moral arguments. Moreover, the anthropology of the imperial self could not be a basis of any meaningful discussion, making absolute tolerance the only basis of moral theory, which in practice nullifies any moral theory. Neuhaus began with a Christian distinction between a moral person and sinful activity. It is not a rejection of a homosexual as a person, but a criticism of a particular sexual act which is at stake. Homosexuality, pointed out Neuhaus, was a "disorder" and an affliction for those who bear it; the causes of homosexuality are complex, the genetically or biologically determined causes cannot be established. The environmental and educational factors are equally important and the data show that homosexual orientation can be reversed. But even if homosexuality were an innate disposition, homosexual activity would not be the right answer to the experience of same sex attraction. Such an act is morally wrong because it is based on an illusion, the very essence of moral wrong, that homosexual acts will lead to human happiness. This is another way of saying that homosexuality does not enable human sexuality to show its full potential to develop a human personality necessary to lead a full and happy life. In other words, the anthropology of the imperial self is an erroneous anthropology, destroying not uplifting human moral capabilities, apart from the most momentary ones of fulfilling one's desires.

Having established such starting points, Neuhaus realized that homosexuality was the subject of a bitter cultural and political conflict. It thus required reasoned argument and public activity to prevent an aggressive minority from shaping the

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[66] *Ibidem*, p. 76.

culture and morality of others according to their own image of moral life, with consequences for public education of children, and such institutions as marriage, family and sexuality. Any serious discussion about homosexuality was in fact a discussion about sexuality in general. Neuhaus agreed with Irving Kristol, who observed that discussing issues of homosexuality in the public sphere requires one to

[…] come to broader judgments about sexual mores and the sexual revolution. History may well record this revolution as the most fundamental social movement of the latter part of this century. The whole question of the relation of sex and procreation, of sexual desire and the ends of desire, of sex and children, of whether there is any natural teleology to sex – these are all deep questions. The question of homosexuality in American public life is going to force an explicit discussion of all those issues. But more directly than almost any of the other liberation movements of the last thirty years, more than the attempt to secure the unbridled right to abortion, more than feminism – the homosexual rights revolution forces a consideration of whether there is any ground in nature for saying that certain human activities are to be preferred to others. It forces us to decide if there is any guidance in nature for private or public behavior. We need to come to grips with the fundamental question of whether there is a natural standard for human happiness, whether there are natural ends for human desires, and whether public policy has, at least in certain ways, to take into account those natural ends or standards.[67]

There is no definite solution to the public policy problems caused by homosexuality and the gay movement. Neuhaus agreed that the gay movement was here to stay because

[…] the unruly passions of human sexuality are a permanent feature of the human condition. Individually and in our several communities we can only try to cope with them better than we have in the past. Four cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice must inform where we go from here. Prudence is the wisdom to understand the nature of the homosexual impulse and its organized insurgency in our public life. Temperance is the refusal to panic, and the tempering of any illusion that either the impulse or the insurgency will disappear. Fortitude means we decline to be intimidated by opponents and brace ourselves for the duration, which will likely be a very long time.[68]

For him, the point from which the whole discussion should start was "a concern for justice", especially for young people who found themselves in a position of sexual perplexity, pressured from within and without "to consign themselves to a way of life marked by compulsion, loneliness, depression, and disease". But justice should also be applied to a discussion about the integrity of public life, which requires, adds Neuhaus, that "truth be spoken with candor and disagreements be engaged with civility". But justice here must above all be applied to families, mothers, fathers and children, who need all the support to "sustain in the present and transmit to the future the "little platoon" of love and fidelity", which is crucial for the preservation of the family in the truest sense of the word. And it is the survival of the family which is ultimately at stake here, and for this very reason the homosexual revolution is the greatest challenge to the integrity of society as it has been so far and as it should

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[67] I. Kristol, *Introduction*, [in:] *Homosexuality and American Public Life*, ed. Ch. Wolfe, Dallas 1999, p. XVII–XVIII.

[68] R. J. Neuhaus, *Love, No Matter What*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. 239.

be.[69] Neuhaus's preconditions for a discussion are crucial, since without them the understanding of the nature of the problem will end in frustration or never-ending polemics. What is important is not that opponents of the most radical aims of the gay movement may lose, since "the real losers would be the sexually perplexed whom we would help, the democracy that we cherish, and the families that claim our support". At stake is the future of the most civilizing force in human history, the family, as the only real transmitter of *caritas* as a feature of character, not intellectual sophistry. People who challenge the "homosexual insurgency" are not traditionalists clinging to the past. True

> [...] we would respect those who came before us, as we hope to be respected by those who come after us. But our cause is for the future: the future of our children and children's children and the future of the human project itself. Next only to religious communities of ultimate promise, the ever--fragile community that we call family is the primary bearer of hope for the future. [This is so because] it is in the families that ordinary people participate as procreators in the continuing creation of life. It is in families that ordinary people make history, and do so much more palpably and believably than do the movers and shakers who presumably make the history of this or any other time. Family is a synonym for history, of continuity through time, and for most people family is their most audacious and sacrificial commitment to the communal hope that in the long run we will not all be dead. The history – limiting horizon of a sexual revolution that is captive to the immediacies of desire is in the service of 'the culture of death'. In the great contest that has now been joined, ours is the party of 'the culture of life'.[70]

The homosexual movement applies drastic tactics to advance its agenda, changing in the course of it the language of public discourse and trying to intimidate opponents. What has been surprising, pointed out Neuhuas is

> [...] the failure of the homosexual insurgency to silence its critics. Thoughtful people with a moderately healthy backbone are no longer intimidated by the charge of 'homophobia'. Along with the epiteths of 'racism' and 'sexism', the charge has lost its force by promiscuous over-use. Not everywhere, to be sure [...] So there is no doubt that the insurgency has made advances. But we would be making a very big mistake if we measured cultural change by fashions in the academy. The academy today is in large part a reservation for the lost tribes of radicalisms past. The homosexual movement is usually dated from the *Stonewall Riot* of 1969. That is almost thirty years ago. As with the radicalism of an ossified civil rights establishment, and with the splintered leadership of the several feminisms, the direction of the homosexual movement has become uncertain. In the entertainment politics of contemporary America, thirty years is a long time to play the role of the avant garde. After a while people come to recognize that everything changes except the avant garde.[71]

He shows that despite the ubiquitous presence of homosexuality in mass culture and its endorsement by liberal-left politicians, "parents are [not] any more welcoming of the prospect that their children may be homosexual". Moreover, the

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[69] *Ibidem*.

[70] *Ibidem*, p. 240–241.

[71] Neuhaus adds that in most colleges and universities a generation ago a faculty member who "publicly announced that he thought homosexuality a good thing would have invited suspicion and censure. In the same schools today, he is likely in deep trouble if he offers less than unqualified approval of the homosexual movement". *Ibidem*, p. 241.

two main currents of the gay movement, the radicals calling for cultural change and those who would like to "mainstream" homosexuality into existing social patterns, are essentially aiming at the same goals as is "evident in their demand for same sex marriage".[72] For him the homosexual movement was "not the unstoppable counter--cultural juggernaut that its champions and many of its opponents once thought to it to be". The movement has suffered severe setbacks. It has not been stopped, but it is

[…] not in unchallenged ascendancy. We are dealing with a deviancy from the heterosexual norm that probably involves no more than two percent of the male population, and half of them do not want to make a public issue of it. Consider, too that after [a generation] of strenuous effort and high confidence of victory, the demand for the formal approval of homosexuality has been turned back again and again also in the liberal oldline protestant churches. Only the small and rapidly disappearing United Church of Christ has approved the ordination of homogenitally active. This might yet be changing.[73]

For him the real strategy to face the challenge of the "homosexual insurgency", should be

[…] to endure, that is the goal of tolerance. To pity, that is the goal of compassion. To embrace, that is the goal of affirmation. Those are the three strategic steps. Despite the overwhelming support of what presume to be the major culture-forming institutions of our society, and most particularly the support of the media, the American people have not been induced to take the fateful step of affirming homosexuality as a good thing.[74]

The general attitude is of social tolerance, but not moral approval. The problem is that a phenomenon once called "the love that dare not speak its name", has been analysed today by many as having become "the neurosis that doesn't know when to shut up". He stresses that the problem with homosexual behaviour is the inability to view the world by the movement from the point of view of them being persons who are incomparably greater and richer than their homosexuality, the inability to meet the world and others on terms not defined by them as the only acceptable ones – demanding unconditional acceptance. Neuhaus stresses the fact that there is a "gay world" and "a straight world", but the terms of discussion

[…] are set mainly by the gay world. Within the subcultural world of its own making, the name of the desire was not only spoken but exuberantly celebrated. Then the borders were declared abolished and, gays, or at least some gays, set out to remake the world. Those who oppose the homosexualizing of the world – which means redefining sexuality as the servicing of desire – will be accused of saying that people should go back into the closet. They may call this world a closet if they choose. What we are saying is that a small minority that is at odds – whether by choice or circumstance or a combination of both – with the constituting institution of society and the right ordering of human sexuality have not the right to remake the world in the image of their dissent. So long as this is an approximately free and democratic society, they cannot push into the closet those who would defend the world we have received and pass it on to coming generations.[75]

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[72] *Ibidem*, p. 242.
[73] *Ibidem*, p. 242–243.
[74] *Ibidem*, p. 243.
[75] *Ibidem*, p. 244.

Neuhaus realizes that the data show a higher "acceptance" of homosexuality and homosexuals, but acceptance is more in relation to "homosexual persons than homosexuality". Such acceptance is not necessarily a bad thing, on the part of parents in particular, but it is often "acceptance with a broken heart despite shattered dreams of grandchildren that will not be". Such acceptance is, or should be, combined with theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, keeping faith with children for whom we care, refusing to believe that the announcement of homosexual identity during youth is the final word on one's child's destiny. And above all

[…] charity, which simply means love. Love no matter what. If this is what is meant by a popular increase in 'acceptance' then we should be thankful for it. What has not happened is a broad public persuasion that homosexuality is a good or even a morally neutral thing. Many have been momentarily intimidated into not expressing their objections and misgivings, but they have not been persuaded, and I do not believe they will be persuaded. On the contrary, they were frontally assaulted by a proposition that most of them had never had occasion to think about, and did not want to think about. They had good reason not to think about it. The philosopher Sidney Hook, late in life, asked a friend, "But what do they actually do?" When told, he recoiled in disbelief and declared, "But that's disgusting!" Sidney Hook's response – reinforced by habit, moral teaching, and devotion to marriage and family – is the response of most people. It is a response that is largely intuitive and pre-articulate. People were told, and many came to be believe, that they should be ashamed of themselves for their irrational prejudice. Many intellectuals – those who belong to what has aptly been described as the 'herd of independent minds' – readily believed it and eagerly performed the appropriate rituals of self--denigration to expiate their sin of homophobia. But for others, what was intuitive and prearticulate is increasingly being thought and articulated. They will no longer be silenced, as witness this conference.[76]

The homosexual leaders and their advocates ask that seemingly innocent question: "Can't we talk about it?" – which is a "mantra of the homosexual movement". The assumption is that talking and thinking about homosexuality would cause people to be more affirmative. But if this happens, and it is beginning to happen, the homosexual leaders, as Neuhaus predicted, may regret such an invitation which essentially forces the American people to face reality as such. As a consequence

[…] examining the way of life that is captive to the immediacies of homoerotic desire – a way of dissolution, deception, despair, and early death – more and more people will find the reasons and the words for a response that was at first intuitive and pre-articulate.[77]

Neuhaus also disagreed with the homosexual movement that the pathologies of the gay subculture, which are even acknowledged by some of the leaders of the movement, would be liquidated if homosexuality won general acceptance. Such acceptance would only guarantee the spread of pathologies: the general consequences of the sexual revolution, of which the gay movement is a beneficiary, amply attest to this. Whatever the pros and cons of such an acceptance as a remedy against patholo-gies, Neuhaus thought that the American people were not prepared

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[76] *Ibidem*, p. 245.
[77] *Ibidem.*

to gamble on who is right. Certainly there is nothing in historical experience or common sense to suggest that pathologies are remedied by integrating them into society, while there is abundant reason to believe that such pathologies will further debase a society that has lost its capacity to censure. Already in our society it is too often the case that moral judgment is the duty that dare not speak its name.[78]

Democratic politics is very unsure ground on which the gay movement can realize its goals. Democratic deliberation has repeatedly led to decisions against radical demands. For this reason, the movement has tried to define its demands in the language of the individual, inalienable, constitutional rights of a minority, which, by definition, are to be accepted even against democratically structured deliberations, so the movement can challenge the mores of society

[…] in courts, government regulations, professional organizations, and the bureaucracies of the public school systems. In these areas their victories have been substantial, and they aspire to much more. In all these arenas, the movement must be challenged at every step – fearlessly, calmly, reasonably, relentlessly. The good of innumerable individuals, and the common good, depend on it. The outcome of that challenge is uncertain. We must do what we can. Elliot said 'For us there is only trying; the rest is not our business.[79]

Another cultural change, claimed Neuhaus, which was also responsible for the victories in the public space of the gay movement, was the cultural erosion of spiritual sensibility, telling us that we are

[…] all flawed creatures living in a fragile world that cannot survive without forbearance and forgiveness. A young man to whom I was explaining the Church's teaching about disordered sexual desire responded. 'But the Church is still saying there is something wrong with me'. Well yes, and with me, and with all of us. But we must never define ourselves – not entirely, not most importantly – by what is wrong with us. Who we are, our identity, is more than that, much more than that. We are defined not by the disorder of our desires but by the right ordering of our loves and loyalties, and by the end of the day we must all ask forgiveness for loves and loyalties betrayed. Without forbearance and forgiveness, we are all hopelessly lost.[80]

Disordered life can never be – Neuhaus was here as Catholic as it is possible to be – a source of proper pride and identity. Identity is gained not discovered. We are not, as humans, Rousseauian, but fallen Adams, who must try to be better than we ourselves really are. Defiance against being in a fallen state does not define our identity, but at the same time each of us is a person who is incomparably better than our disability or disorder. We must strive, pointed out Neuhaus

[…] humbly in painful awareness of our different but often severe disabilities. But we must also do so firmly, knowing that they are not helped and many lives are ruined by their effort to impose upon others their defiant denial of the troubling truth. 'Can't we talk about it?', they ask. Well yes, we are talking about it, and we will continue to talk about it. Although some seem determined to view us as their enemies, we will refuse to view them as our enemies. We will talk about it with them, and with

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[78] *Ibidem*, p. 246–247.

[79] *Ibidem*, p. 246.

[80] *Ibidem*.

whomever else is willing to talk. We will talk about it, God willing, in a manner that is informed by the classical virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice. And we will talk about it in a manner that is graced by the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Love above all. Love, no matter what.[81]

Neuhaus suggested practical measures to accompany public policy. In order to force the gay movement to participate in a rational debate and to advance a traditional agenda in the area of sexuality and public life, the imperial judiciary had to be restrained, to prevent it from creating additional rights via judicial fiat in response to different lobbying groups. Another solution is to uphold federalism: the rule that citizens should have a right to have their mores, in this case sexual mores, shape public morality. Federalism enables an explosive issue to be tackled by means of a motley collection of compromises in which the agenda of the gay lobby will not be a state imposed norm. Finally, parents should be supported in being allowed to decide the upbringing of their children according to their own mores against the views of the self-imposed "enlightened" and politically correct elites and fellow travellers. Family values as the philosophy of American education should be pursued against the liberal left values of individual autonomy and self-expression. Parents instinctively defend their children against the homosexual agenda being presented as the norm, not because they will stop loving their homosexual children if they happen to be homosexual, but because this choice or disposition will prevent them from a fulfilled life that homosexuality denies them. The homosexual revolution is part of the sexual revolution and as such it has been promoted above all as a battering ram to destroy traditional values in support of the new values deemed by the liberal-left as fostering true community, equality and solidarity. But the real purpose here, Neuhaus points out, is the destruction of such a community by overseeing those, who by instinct, moral reasoning and common sense, see that the homosexual sexual revolution – and the sexual revolution in general – is a road to nowhere: the sexual revolution's sinister smile of liberation has been shown to beckon along a progressive path to loneliness and despair.

Neuhaus also tried to battle the intimidation campaign promulgated by the supporters of new, alleged crimes such as "homophobia" or "hate speech". This campaign aimed to prevent any argument or criticism, and to force everyone to accept without further ado the whole agenda of the homosexual movement as a basis for an equal and just society. But Neuhaus argued for an understanding of a differentiation between a person and their deed, between a person and their sin, and further pointed out that "contempt for what a person does is not intimidation", nor is it a breach of tolerance.[82] It is the right of moral judgment meted out in relation to the conduct of a person, criticism of this conduct, and the duty to warn about the danger of losing one's moral compass with dire consequences for the criticized person themself. A moral duty to make such a person realize the potential consequences

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[81] *Ibidem*, p. 247.
[82] Idem, *While We're At It…*, p. 77.

[…] of life that turns on the identification of the self with the satisfaction of morally disordered desire, a way of life marked by a tragically high incidence of loneliness, alcoholism, drugs, disease, and early death. There is a more widespread tolerance, but it is not true that the battle for the acceptance of homosexuality has been won. One admires parents who continue to love their gay children, but in the faces of those who carry signs declaring that they are proud of their gay sons one detects the determination to hide the sadness of wishing it were not so. […] This moral duty is based on an assumption that there might be a contradiction, a tension between love and truth. Speaking the truth, and inviting all of us to live in the truth, is love's duty.[83]

Another reason for being against the "hate crimes" campaign is the widespread gay subculture practice of cruising in public places for sex with straight or semi straight persons. Neuhaus, quoting one of the homosexual activists, pointed out that Americans should think long and hard about making the feeling of repugnance at an unwanted sexual advance subject to additional penalties under the law. He recalled Martin Luther King who used to say that

the law cannot make you love, but it can prevent you from lynching me. And, if you don't lynch me, you may eventually come to love me [adding that]. We should certainly love our gay brothers, even as we disapprove of the acts that define them as gay. Loving them includes our saying, always lovingly, that they are wrong in trying to use the law to stigmatize those who disapprove of what they do, which is not the only or the most important thing that determines who they are.[84]

The homosexuality issue was for Neuhaus also fundamental for reasons connected with affirmative action. If speaking "truth in the name of love" is considered to be defined as "hate speech", or as "intimidation" and discriminatory, then the homosexual community can be defined as a "suspect group" to which antidiscrimination laws will be extended, protecting sexual orientation. Affirmative action for professed homosexuals will follow suit. This resembles the logic of affirmative action for blacks or women. If it is wrong now to take homosexuality into account in hiring for jobs, or in renting places, than it must have been wrong throughout history. This means, as Neuhaus pointed out, that homosexuals might claim a history of unjust oppression, like other minorities, with affirmative action as one of the tried and allegedly just measures. This amounts to a social radical revolution by means of the state apparatus for a social cause. Neuhaus recognized the poisonous fruit of this idea, which originated in the civil rights revolution – the idea that social justice can be restored only if we promote and advance a certain way of life. But this is a declaration of war on autonomous institutions such as churches or families, which, by implication, perpetuate such an "injustice" defined arbitrarily by the state. Such autonomous institutions would then be pressured to change their teachings, upbringing and creedal beliefs and do what the state declares to be the only proper way of behaving under threat of punishment. If the logic of affirmative action could have a certain efficacy in the case of race relations, claimed Neuhaus, because it was con-

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[83] *Ibidem*, p. 72; idem, *Homosexuality and Love's Duty*, "First Things", November 2007, p. 69.
[84] Idem, *Why Hate Crimes Are Bad?*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square…*, p. 174.

sonant with the reality of moral life, in the case of homosexuals it was raw social engineering. Homosexuals are excluded not because of the colour of their skin, but because of behaviour which is not acceptable according to the moral, and justified assessment of people willing to tolerate them but not willing to let views about reality and moral life be defined by an aggressive minority.[85]

Neuhaus also opposed so-called "homosexual marriage", long on the agenda of the gay movement. It tried to redefine marriage so it could be "disentangled from childbearing and child-rearing, while at the same time [be] connected to a growing number of legal entitlements", that is to privileges paid by society to married couples.[86] The gay movement is aiming here to transform culture by changing language itself, since "the proponents of same-sex marriage know that something bigger is involved, namely the official recognition of love".[87] This is the major difference between civil union and marriage. The former is a mere legal, private certificate; the latter, that is marriage, involves a public endorsement. This is the reason why the gay movement insists on the word and the institution of "marriage". It wants homosexual marriage to be recognized, as a sign of public cultural equality. This change of language involves a radical change of anthropology. Much more than mere semantics is involved here. At stake is a radical redefinition of the underlying anthropological and ontological assumptions which have so far defined marriage in all cultures and religions because of the definite purpose for which it was devised. The new institution is demanded precisely because such a change and a procedure corroborating this change would assign people a "new identity based on gender".[88]

Marriage has, historically, been an institution, points out Neuhaus, that begins with a ceremony which changes males into husbands and females into wives. Until the gay movement began to question it, such a ceremony was meant to certify a lifetime commitment, which involved security as well as a particular social role which was defended by law and culture, so such commitments could not be discarded too easily and all considerations to the contrary – including getting out of such commitments – were to be tortuously tested, that is treated as not an easy option. A lifetime commitment was thus a character task for which people were trained by culture and law, including rigorous preparations for it. Whatever threatened it was considered a vice, a danger, a failure, a sin. Marriage has been treated, in all cultures and religions, as an arrangement of social and personal order to guarantee that a community has the best protected environment for bringing up children. Its purpose has also been to civilize unruly young men with promiscuous tendencies. They were to be civilized by women, whose role was recognized as being rooted in nature (gender) and not social construction. This civilizing role of women towards men was a trade-

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[85] See an advanced argument on this issue: M. Pakaluk, *Homosexuality and the Common Good*, [in:] *Homosexuality in American Public Life…*, p. 170–191.

[86] R. J. Neuhaus, *While We're at It…*, p. 86.

[87] *Ibidem*.

[88] *Ibidem*.

-off transaction, in which the unruly freedom of the latter was traded for a promise of a home provided by the former. This trade off transaction convinced men to work hard for their wives and children, in exchange for the equally hard work of providing the comforts of home, defined differently, but in a complementary way. The mutual commitments of women and men, as wives and husbands, focused on aims transcending their urges and autonomously defined goals, and it was exactly this social and cultural – but above all moral – value of the goods created by such mutual commitments which was protected by culture and the legal system.[89] Such an understanding of marriage is totally subverted by the new definition of it demanded by the gay movement. Neuhaus quotes one author who captured this dramatic change well:

[…] the symbolic danger that gay marriage poses to such an arrangement is obvious. It alters the public meaning of the word by further draining it of its power to reinforce traditional expectations of behavior. What does it mean to be a husband in a world where a man could have one of its own? This is up to each individual couple, one is tempted to say. Fair enough; but the words we use to describe our relationships are shared cultural property. There is no private language. In this sense, granting the word 'marriage' to gay couples will eventually affect everyone.[90]

Same sex marriage is seen in such a case simply as

[…] a fulfilment of a goal of the women's movement, which, historically speaking, is radical: 'the decline of the patriarchal legal structure and rise of the goal of self-fulfilment'. Obligations [concludes Neuhaus] – patriarchal, matriarchal, or simply faithful – are out, Self-fulfilment is in. Get used to it. Or not.[91]

This self-fulfilment is declared as the sole anthropological perspective, but it was mandated by the Supreme Court decisions. In the "Planned Parenthood v. Casey" case of 1992, the Court, in the words of Justice Kennedy stated that: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of life."[92] The passage was repeated by the Court in "Lawrence v. Texas" of 2003.[93] This statement meant, pointed out Neuhaus, that an imperial autonomous self seeking self-fulfilment trumps anything, including any democratically decided social interest, the end station of the logic of rights being the sole end of human life within the structures of the liberal state. The meaning of the "pursuit of happiness" of the "Declaration of Independence", the foundational document of America, is dependent on a particular anthropology to find its precise meaning. It

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[89] I recall in this context an anecdote quoted by Neuhaus in a conversation with me about Moses descending from the Sinai Mountain and declaring to the sinning Jews: "I have two announcements for you: one is good, and one is bad. The good one is that Yahweh, after my long argument on your behalf, has decided to reduce the Commandments to ten. The bad one is that adultery is still on the list".

[90] The quote is from Adam Haslett in New Yorker, [in:] R. J. Neuhaus, *While We're at It…*, p. 86.

[91] This idea originated in the civil rights revolution, *ibidem*, p. 86.

[92] "Planned Parenthood v. Casey", 505 US 833, 1992; on the anthropological and social policy implications of the Kennedy decision see: H. Arkes, *Natural Rights and the Right to Choose*, Cambridge 2002, p. 42–43, 78–80, 239–240.

[93] Lawrence v. Texas, 539 US 558, 2003.

does not contain any "right" per se. Once this "pursuit of happiness" is decoupled from the Christian framework of "happiness" – which was an assumption that was taken for granted by the Framers – and given the post-1968 interpretation of "emancipation" from any oppression, including oppression by culture and religion as such, the imperial autonomous self as a basis of auto-created morality becomes the basis of law. This is what the Court stated in "Planned Parenthood v. Casey" and "Lawrence v. Texas". It declared that the state's sole interest in sexual matters taking place between consenting adults – in the first case abortion, in the second case homosexuality – is simply to protect the unrestrained expression of personal autonomy. As Neuhaus wrote, quoting George Weigel, "it puts faithful Christians and Jews on notice: 'There is a new and jealous god in the land: the imperial autonomous Self'. Those who serve another God are disqualified".[94] Such a position as stated by the Court in "Casey" and "Lawrence" decisions puts forth a radically liberationist view that the state has no authority to restrict any conduct which is related only to one's self and one's consenting partner – a logic which extends to all other areas of such conduct.

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[94] R.J. Neuhaus, *No End of Debate About the End of Democracy*, "First Things", December 2003, p. 72. Liberalism reached its full potential here as a doctrine maximizing freedom for everyone, a duty of equal access to any possible maximum of freedom. But such a demand, essentially a redefinition of fundamental aspects of human life in the name of the same amount of freedom for everyone, made the state into a sovereign reigning over the entire social life. The New Left concept of "liberation" or "emancipation" from oppression of any institution, public or private, is just a political program rooted in this anthropology demanding from the state a fulfillment of this aim. Liberalism rejects here all reasons which are transcendental to human being and their ends. It claims at the same time that it does this in a neutral way, excluding any metaphysical speculations, allegedly using only procedural means – that is, in fact, technical means. This aim of maximization of liberty for everyone, at the same time making the human being the very measure of everything, has increasingly demanded a definition of this overreaching aim as a right to fulfill any individual desire. Once inexorably defined this way, since no truth about man external to him exists, the fulfillment of such an aim would simply be a technical matter, involving implementation of proper methods of managing society so desires could be met. As a technical problem, they could then be handed over to "experts", people with proper competences. Liberalism, in considering the imperial autonomous self as the sole measure of the verity of human existence, contains a totalitarian potential, even if its tyranny is mild: a persecution by political correctness, psychotherapy or ridicule supported by a veiled threat of elimination from legitimate public life. Institutions not conforming to such an anthropology are put under pressure to conform and "experts" work on them incessantly in the arena of public opinion. Social order then becomes subjected to technical rationality, a purely abstract 'objective'. As such it should not be subjected to any limitations imposed by culture, religion, history or memory. The technical rationality of organizing the desires of the autonomous self by "experts" thus nullifies all ties as redundant or as obstacles to true fulfillment. Freedom is treated as a liberation from all ties considered oppressions and hindrances to a full liberation of the autonomous self. On such an understanding of modern liberalism, see J. Kalb, *The Tyranny of Liberalism: Understanding and Overcoming Administered Freedom, Inquisitorial Tolerance and Equality by Command*, Wilmington 2008, p. 45–82, 133–152.

Affirmative action

Neuhaus became convinced that the civil rights issue, with which he had been con-
nected since the 60s, had been taken over and corrupted by ideologues and interests
groups. One such issue was affirmative action. Race was the American "original sin",
and "counting by race" was a fact of life which Martin Luther King, Neuhaus and
civil rights activists wanted to destroy. Equality was to mean that people were to be
judged not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character and abi-
lities. Whatever affirmative action was intending to do it was a curious return to the
issue of "counting by race" in American public policy, with many unintended and
sinister consequences. "Counting by race" in order to benefit blacks was an invitation
for those, as Neuhaus remarked , who "do not have the interest of blacks at heart so
to do a complete count of the black reality, including much that in the recent past was
not mentioned in polite company".[95] There was a cacophony of voices arguing that
colour-blindness was a naïve ideal, that the "race issue" mattered if we wanted to
understand public policy.

   Neuhaus was aware that "sometimes taking race into account is necessary and
appropriate [but] the government must be colour-blind as in 'equality under the law'".[96]
In the post 60s regulations the government could not be "colour-blind". It was obli-
ged to do race counting. Also, the US census did not provide any criteria relating to
how to count by race while differentiating by race . For Neuhaus this was being done
by the person themself – a sheer declaration of will indicated in the census docu-
ments. This was a stupid policy, since

   […] great interests are at stake in race counting. Government grants, voting districts, school
transfers, and much else are determined by the race count. If your claim is contested, the 'one drop
rule' of any blood other than Caucasian gets you counted as a minority, with attendant entitlements.
[…] The census divides Americans into White, Hispanic, Black and Asians, with a proposition to add
other categories to such arbitrary ones, including 'multiracial'. But obviously and "not surprisingly,
minority activists strongly oppose this, fearing any dilution of their numbers and their consequent claim
on benefits aimed at compensating them for their 'disadvantage'" . This state of affairs, more and more
Americans are realizing, is simply crazy; and dangerously crazy because it inevitably exacerbates the
race consciousness that has so plagued [American] history. The civil rights movement under Dr. King
was largely successful in fighting malign race consciousness. The great mistake since then was to insti-
tutionalize a supposedly benign race consciousness that has generated new and potentially greater racial
suspicion and hostility than we had before [the civil rights revolution].[97]

   Neuhaus realized that racial discrimination in America might be permanent,
and hopes of intermarriage had not materialized. But the real "most basic discrimi-
nation, despite laws against it, is in housing – in the dynamics that determine where

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[95] R. J. Neuhaus, *Counting by Race*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square…*, p. 51.
   [96] *Ibidem*.
   [97] *Ibidem*, p. 51–52. Neuhaus quotes Jorge Amselle of the Center for Equal Opportunity,
a Washington think tank: "You don't cure the problem of people treating each other differently be-
cause of race. If you want a color-blind society, you have to have color-blind public policy".

people live. And it may not be accurate to call this discrimination.'"[98] The overwhelming majority of blacks, both poor and affluent, live in overwhelmingly black neighbourhoods, despite the fact that large majorities of blacks and whites say they would like to live in an integrated neighbourhood, but with a different conception of what "integrated" means.[99] The proclivity to live in neighbourhoods segregated into black and white ones mixes questions of prejudice and preference – with difficulties separating the two. If blacks move in (to a white neighbourhood) in great numbers, the fact of life is that crime will increase, schools will decline and house values will drop, and both whites and blacks understand this. Moving out may be an issue of life quality – and not necessarily of prejudice. If so, the starting point is not governmental policy in housing matters or in fighting racial attitudes (allegedly manifesting themselves in flight from such neighbourhoods) but, pointed out Neuhaus, to upgrade the black community in all its aspects, an issue which the black community has to take on itself.[100]

Neuhaus, noting disappointments linked to the civil rights movement and its taking over by people who turned it into a self-perpetuating business of "fighting for civil rights", commented on the change of the "civil rights" mood. For those at the "cutting edge of the movement" like himself

[…] it was a joy of being part of something grand and indubitably good. 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very Heaven'. With Dr. King, I believed that what Gunnar Myrdal had called 'the American dilemma' was turning out to be something like the redemption of the American experiment… It was a long, long time ago…. The rubble of broken dreams, the stark terror of broken

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[98] *Ibidem*, p. 52.

[99] *Ibidem*. As Neuhaus shows, for blacks it means: 50/50, for whites: 20/80. In the case of blacks in white neighbourhoods, if the number goes up to 25%, then the neighbourhoods resegregate as black. N. Glazer, *The Public Interest*, Fall 1995.

[100] R. J. Neuhaus, *Counting by Race…*, p. 53. Neuhaus quotes Glazer here to the effect that "government action can never match, in scale and impact, the crescive effect of individual, voluntary decision. This is what has raised group after group, this is what has broken down the boundaries of ethnicity and race (yes, race, when it comes to some races) in the past. But these effects have operated excruciatingly slowly when it comes to American blacks. They have operated to some extent, as we see by the greatly expanded number of blacks making middle-class incomes, by the creation of integrated middle-class neighborhoods. It is the scale that has been so disappointing. Why our expectations were so disappointed is still obscure to me, and all the research does not make it clearer. We have to go to the disaster that encompasses the black family, the failure to close educational achievement gaps, the rise of worklessness among black males, the increase in crime, and, behind all these, there are other factors in infinite regress. This failure leads many to propose large scale government action, unlikely as the prospects for such are in the present and foreseeable political climate. But even if that climate were better, it is hard to see what government programs could achieve. They would be opposed by the strongest motives that move men and women: their concern for family, children, and property. However wrong I was in expecting more rapid change to result from civil rights revolution, a greater measure of government effort to promote residential integration directly was not the answer, and is still not the answer. The forces that will produce it are still individual and voluntaristic, rather than governmental and authoritative. To adapt the title of Glenn Loury's book, it will have to be 'one by one', individual by individual, family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood. Slowly as these work, there is really no alternative".

lives in the urban underclass. It is [now] a very different time… It is a time of candor when thoughtful people who do not have a racist bone in their body are exposing the lies of a civil rights establishment and its liberal claque that have no legitimate claim on the luminous moment that was the civil rights movement of Dr. King. It is also a dangerous time when permission slips are being issued to say things heretofore forbidden. The haters, white and black, are taking heart. But for most Americans it is probably a time of disappointment mixed with relief. They feel that over these thirty years they have done what they were supposed to do, and it did not work out at all the way they hoped. So now they have decided that, unless they or their families are threatened by it, they are going to stop worrying about race relations in America. They have decided to stop even thinking about it. One feels one should argue against that decision, but it is hard to know just how .[101]

The greatest hopes of his youth gone sour, Neuhaus set out to make the discussion about race meaningful. Speaking about black America, one had to speak with "respect for the humanity of others". He realized that all the ugly faces of the modern black underclass: the dope-pusher, the absolutely morally unformed teenager who is "father of five and father to none", the criminal who kills a grocer to get a candy bar – they were all, nonetheless, created in God's image. For him that was "not liberal sentimentality", but the very essence of Christian doctrine, the first step of an honest return to the basics of the issue, which is also a moral issue. Social problems in America are general American social problems, not just black problems. For this reason there really was

[...] no choice but to condemn and stigmatize as effectively as we can separatisms and racisms in whatever form. Pusillanimous academics who have been intimidated by radical shuffles must find the courage to challenge the racial separatism now so deeply entrenched at most major universities. People who say they are speaking "as a white man" or as an "African American female" are to be told in no uncertain terms that they have nothing interesting to say unless they are prepared to speak as themselves. They should know that, if they are to claim serious attention, they cannot demean themselves by reducing their identity to a contingency over which they have no control. If we understand what is at stake, in every forum on every subject there will be zero tolerance of the abdication of personal responsibility. Nothing will do but a frankly moral condemnation of crime and vice, whether the vice be drug addiction or everyday sloth. The old excuses are out. Victim politics is finished. The American people have simply turned a deaf ear to all that. They've had enough, more than enough. That seems harsh, and it is, unless joined to the hope that there is still a will to overcome the American dilemma, as in "We shall overcome".[102]

Neuhaus was wary of such concepts as "self-esteem" and resisted treating people as being morally not responsible for their actions. He opposed the "victim" mentality and a division of the populace into "victims" belonging to the lower classes: criminals, or addicts. He refused to accept the idea of "defining deviancy down" and obliterating a hierarchy of acceptable and unacceptable moral behaviour. This was a wrong moral approach, a "self-indulging mentality of adolescent boys". Referring to a ban on using terms such as "lowbrow", he observed that this was

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[101] *Ibidem*, p. 55.
[102] *Ibidem*, p. 56.

[…] a reality that cannot be denied. Here it means not the economically poor but the morally impoverished. In the past we were more candid about the fact that a large number of people in any society are moral slobs. This recognition is key to Edward C. Banfield's brilliant 1968 analysis of social policy *The Unheavenly City*. Once Upon a Time there were 'our kind of people' and other kind of people. The better kinds of people felt an obligation to help uplift the lesser breeds. Today the lesser breeds are victims and the better kind are victimizers – or at least so our academic and media elites would convince us with [victims] pitiably grateful for the assurance that Masters feels their pain.[103]

To overcome black-white hostilities, a return to the old liberal and classical American and Christian solutions had to be tried again. For Neuhaus, this meant that blacks should befriend whites and vice versa as individual people, learning to trust one another and working together. This is, as Neuhaus says

[…] a different kind of affirmative action that can make a difference for the better. Thirty years of mostly well-intended policies have turned upon us with a vengeance. It's not what we had in mind back then; it's not what we had in mind at all. But now we know where it started going wrong. It started going wrong when we tried to remedy malign race-consciousness with benign race consciousness, when we started counting by race.[104]

The race problem brought Neuhaus to the issue of welfare reform, of which he was a great champion. Welfare reform was for him both a fiscal and a moral imperative and those "who claim to speak for the poor but don't know any poor people stand exposed as the frauds that they are".[105] School choice and adoption especially concerned Neuhaus. He considered school choice a basic parental right,

[…] a matter of simple justice, and for many poor parents it is a matter of survival. Governmental monopoly school systems [in major cities] are an unmitigated disaster. They cannot be fixed, they must be replaced. The monopoly is defended by what is probably the most powerful political lobby in America, the teacher's union. These unions are the enemy of the children of the poor. Nobody in these major cities who can afford an alternative sends their children to the public school. In opposing vouchers and other remedies, the government school system establishment invokes the separation of church and state. What we need, what the poor particularly need, is the separation of school and state.[106]

Another public policy which concerned Neuhaus was the racial policy of adoption; he showed that all kinds of policies and procedures had in fact made interracial adoption impossible. Such policies

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[103] Idem, *Bill Clinton and the American Character…*, p. 168, 170.
[104] Idem, *Counting by Race…*, p. 58. Neuhaus places a special responsibility on local churches, which could form partnerships, even if the more affluent white churches tended to be condescending sometimes. To which Neuhaus responds "May be so, but so what? The temptation can be resisted, and the important thing is that what is done is done together as equals in Christ".
[105] *Ibidem*, p. 57.
[106] *Ibidem*, p. 58. "In New York it is estimated that one out of ten poor children beginning first grade will graduate from high school prepared for real college education, 'real ' meaning not majoring in 'black studies' or some other pseudo-discipline, and not dropping out in the first year. Ninety percent of the students in the parochial [Catholic] schools of the city – drawn from the same population – go on to college or technical training for a real job spend[ing] half [of public schools] money."

[…] must be called what they are. They are racist. Hundreds of thousands of children have their lives blighted in foster care while millions of American couples yearn to adopt them while ideologically driven social workers and psychologists tell us it is better for a child to die in a drive-by shooting than to have his 'black identity' confused because he is adopted by white people. This is madness, and cruelty of a high order.[107]

But the greatest case of corruption of the black "civil rights establishment" for Neuhuas was its stance on abortion. Abortion had become "probably the greatest crime prevention measure ever invented", and predominantly so in the black community. People who were poor and black were a "drag on society. We would all be better off if there were fewer of them". Americans had spent, with little success, trillions of dollars since the 60s trying to eliminate black poverty but abortion turned out to be a "more efficient means of eliminating the drag". The extermination of anti-social elements has a sordid history and the Holocaust, the German Nazi euthanasia or the United States and Sweden eugenics programs testify to that. But

[…] abortion is probably the greatest crime prevention measure ever invented. [Studies show that] the biggest factor [in crime prevention] is that the millions of young men most likely to commit crimes were killed early on. A refreshing note of candor in the current discussion is that nobody is denying that all those fetuses killed in the womb were really human beings. So it seems the question of when human life begins has been settled once and for all. The dramatic decline in crime began eighteen years after Roe vs Wade, and a few years earlier in those states that liberalized their abortion law. Of course commentaries steer away from a too-explicit reference to race, although everybody is aware of the astonishingly inordinate incidence of crimes by young male blacks and the equally inordinate incidence of abortions procured by black women.[108]

For many such a discussion is not about the rightness or wrongness of abortion – it just so happens that the desired outcome (reducing crime) is related to killing black babies. If a particular group is overwhelmingly responsible for crime and related social problems, the logical conclusion might follow that the elimination of large numbers of people belonging to that group "will reduce the problem". The argument is sound but what is

[…] morally odious is the cool and disinterested way in which the commentariat is discussing what might fairly be described as racial cleansing. It's too bad about all those dead babies, but it is a kind of solution to the crime problem, if not a final solution. Meanwhile, those who style themselves black leaders, especially political leaders, are overwhelmingly in support of the unlimited abortion licence, thus maintaining their distinction of being the only ethnic or racial leadership in history to actively collaborate in dramatically reducing the number of people they claim to lead. If they had been allowed to live, there would be about twenty million more blacks in America. White racists have reason to be grateful for what is sometimes still called the civil rights leadership. Today's black leaders are more compliant, much to the satisfaction of those who think we would all be better off with fewer black people.[109]

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[107] *Ibidem*, p. 57.
[108] Idem, *The Public Square…*, p. 73. Neuhaus refers to research on the topic summed up by S. Lewistt, S. Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explains the Hidden Side of Everything*.
[109] "[As Jessie Jackson once said] the war on poverty had been replaced by a war on the poor." R. J. Neuhaus, *The Public Square…*, p. 73.

Affirmative action and quotas, a.k.a. diversity, had become especially suspicious for Neuhaus. He understood that rights worth fighting for may easily be converted into positive laws which enter the complex social and economic world, becoming part of ordinary power politics. Moral discourse is then translated into public policy language and a discussion about what works and what does not, what is helpful and what is corrupting, becomes difficult. Equal rights and equal opportunity for people as unique moral individuals may then easily turn into programs of affirmative action, quotas and racial preferences which cannot be discussed on their merits due to the moral high ground from which they were being driven. Individual merit, moral right and duty can, at the same time, turn into a free, corrupting ride for such individuals within the context of group entitlements. This was the reason Neuhaus parted ways with the civil rights establishment. Once concrete public policy measures were coupled with the high moral ground, they became the ideological tools of a political, social and economic power play, a kind of illusion of mastery over the incredibly complicated problem of race – or any other issue for that matter. A clear cut moral problem was being converted, pointed out Neuhaus, into a political issue – with this transformation being seen as a "solution". People of good faith who engaged in a discussion on the basis of the merits and demerits of particular policies were excluded, accused of "racism", "misogyny" or "homophobia". Such people – while voicing doubts, reservations and caution – respond with a shrug and walk away.[110]

The affirmative action crisis, part of the civil rights movement gone sour, constituted a part of a larger crisis, a dependency-welfare crisis.[111] This dependency-welfare crisis had become pervasive, claimed Neuhaus, because all of society's other sources of support and personal security, apart from state services and money, had been corrupted. The welfare state's ambition was to decouple individuals from any source of mutual dependence and *caritas* stemming from other sources of solidarity – for instance, families. Dependence was a subconscious consequence of the welfare-state's weakening of all other sources of support, eliminating self-sufficiency. The welfare state policies ignored and subverted human capacities stemming from non-material dimensions of personhood. Such social policies assumed that human beings were either passive subjects or instrumental rationalists, who operate according to the economic calculus of the welfare state, then convert it into social capital, thus influencing behaviour accordingly. But human beings act as agents in the social sphere not only on the basis of self-interest but on the basis of even more important and strongly held values. The welfare state was in crisis, implied Neuhaus, because it destroyed social bonds which it thought it was going to strengthen. Its notion of what

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[110] For more on that issue, which was so much on Neuhaus's mind, see a kind of elegiac article by a close collaborator of his, J. Nuechterlein, *Race Matters*, "First Things", February 2011, p. 3–5.

[111] This crisis was already identified by Neuhaus in the pamphlet *To Empower People* from 1976, co-authored by Peter Berger, and based on his experiences in the slums of Brooklyn. P. Berger, R. J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, Washington DC 1996, p. 157–164, 202–208.

society was – a collection of rational and self-interested individuals – simply ignored this crucial dimension of relationships (rooted in strongly held values about those relationships) being as important as material calculations, for instance, for families on social welfare. Human beings, Neuhaus stressed this especially, were not free, self--determining individuals, but dependent social beings. The solidarity and character necessary for social advancement as well as general welfare have little to do with the social policies of the modern welfare state, which are counterproductive, detrimental and outwardly inimical to social welfare as such.

Multiculturalism

An important aspect of the culture war was so-called "multiculturalism", which is another name today, observed Neuhaus, for battling the culture of the West in the name of battling an "oppressive" system of thought. In the name of multiculturalism, "the entirety of the progressive academy, [this] herd of independent minds has for some years now been earnestly engaged in discrediting such outdated notions".[112]

    Such an approach has its source, of course, in ideologies of the "post" mentality, such as post-colonialism, post-modernism and post-structuralism. Multicultural ideology claims that, instead of globalizing its values, the West should stay in its own cultural sphere and relativize its force on its own turf so as to atone for past oppressions as well in order not to offend the sensibilities of other cultures increasingly present within Western societies. Multiculturalism treats all cultures and all systems of thought as essentially incomparable. The aim of such a multicultural idea was originally to foster respect for other cultures, but radicals pushed it to the point of inconsistency, whereby it became a rigid ideology suppressing Western heritage. For this respect did not extend to Western culture itself, regarded as a shameful crime against humanity, and thus forbidden to pass judgment on other cultures. Multiculturalism is thus a support of all cultures except one's own, but it is characterized more by what it is against than by what it is for. Negation of Christianity is a natural consequence of such a stance, with actions to remove all displays of Christian symbolic presence in public, which many times provoked bitter commentary from Neuhaus. Anti-Western multiculturalism is rooted in "white guilt", an ideology of "victimhood" and a ubiquitous relativization of truth. Culture ceased to be "the best that has been thought and said", according to the classical definition of it by Matthew Arnold, and became a statement that all cultures and religions are immeasurable, equal and thus relative, a kind of anthropological outgrowth of human adjustment to particular conditions.

    Such relativism has consequences. One is linked to the rule of law and, indeed, the very definition of rights and human rights. Eternal rights and self-evident truths reflecting common humanity – even if expressed in different words which humanity tries to discern – are abandoned. A more amorphous concept of social justice takes its

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[112] R. J. Neuhaus, *Against Christian Politics*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square…*, p. 69.

place, which is subject to unlimited political manipulation. If all cultures are relative then what we have is moral nihilism overseen by the commissars of ensuring that no culture can win against another. If morals become values, then they are expressions of culture, which leads to a situation where there are no universal moral principles. In such a case, no culture can be subjected to any values, since there are no transcultural values to stand in judgment over any particular culture.[113] Neuhaus considers multiculturalism as an ideology that prevents any strong sense of identification with Western tradition. This is a name

> […] for another assault on a cherished particularity in the name of vaulting universalisms [an ideology] usually unsafe for ideas and practices that have nothing to recommend them other than tradition, common sense, and popular devotion.[114]

The ostensible aim of such a multicultural idea – in cases of eliminating Christianity from the public square – is an ethical anti-Western urge to not "offend" other faiths, which leads in practice to the prohibition of Christianity by regulations and public condemnations. For Neuhaus, true multiculturalism is something Americans have known from the beginning. It means simply

> […] an interest in and eagerness to engage other cultures. [This] depends upon the affirming of our culture which, alone of world cultures, thinks multiculturalism a very good thing. It is not, one notes, just a question of who got here *first*. It's a question of *who* got here first. Call contemporary America pluralistic or call it a melting pot or call it a gorgeous mosaic , it didn't just happen. It happened because a people formed by biblical religion believed that hospitality to other cultures is a virtue. Today's multiculturalists who insist that all cultures are equal except our own are, by repressing the public expression of the religious grounds of that belief, inviting a resurgence of the nasty nativism that reduces cultural differences and tensions to the bullying question of who got here first. Genuine multiculturalism is the product of a particular culture and will not survive its public demise.[115]

There was a more sinister side to multicultural ideology, which Neuhaus analysed in the context of Bill Clinton's sexual scandal of 1997 and the president's appeal to groups which defended him, mainly feminists and multiculturalists. Multicultural policy was at the centre of Clinton's administration.[116] This ideology of multiculturalism was expressed by Clinton best when he stated that in the future "there will be no majority race in America". It contained, pointed out Neuhaus, several troubling assumptions of which the most visible was a supposition that there would be inevitable, uncontrolled mass immigration to America involving mainly non-white populations, with the birth rate of the immigrants far exceeding that of the native born. But another and

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[113] On such a distinction between culture and civilization see K. Windschuttle, *The Cultural War on Western Civilization*, [in:] *The Survival of the West*, eds. H. Kramer, R. Kimball, p. 120.

[114] R. J. Neuhaus, *While We're at It…*, p. 69.

[115] *Ibidem*, p. 69.

[116] This was, probably inadvertently, expressed best by the Freudian slip of vice-president Al Gore when he translated the United States official seal's motto *E Pluribus Unum* ["Out of the many, one"], as "Out of the one, many".

[…] most troubling [was] that the current majority consists of a race called white people. The polite term for this is racialism. The more common term is racism.Apart from Aryan militia circles, few nonblack, non-Asian, non-Hispanic Americans think of themselves as belonging to the white race. The alarming thing was the resurrection of the idea of a white race, an idea from the era most of us hoped was definitely past. Pitting the 'majority race' against nonwhite claimants to justice is a sure formula for exacerbating the tensions [politicians say they] want to heal. It necessarily involves, among other things, the discredited and profoundly unjust policies of affirmative action and quotas [I] have agreed [that] we must regain control over immigration policies that are manifestly out of control. [I] disagreed [that] race should be a factor in shaping immigration policies. No good can come from asking the American people whether they think it is a good idea that fifty years from now a majority should be nonwhite. This is a racialist, if not racist, way of posing the question. Multiculturalists and the champions of a white majority have in common the aim of raising race-consciousness, and in this they powerfully reinforce one another. To tell the majority of Americans that they should 'celebrate' the prospect that in fifty years most Americans will not be like them is politically stupid and morally wrong. It is politically stupid because most people think that being like them is a pretty good thing. It is morally wrong because it invites the majority of people to identify themselves by race. The most long-standing and divisive struggle in American history has been to overcome the racial mindset. Good arguments can be made for continuing to welcome a large number of immigrants to this country. [But] to frame the public debate in terms of the proposal that half a century from now there will be no majority race in America is politically stupid and morally wrong.[117]

Multicultural ideology strengthened race consciousness and caused a "balkanization" of America, which was one of the most visible aspects of the culture war alongside identity politics, another feature of post 1968 politics. Identity politics, as Neuhuaus noted, had been a part of the hallowed trinity of the cultural left. These are race, class and gender. They originally constituted a response to culture defined as an "oppressive" structure in need of "emancipation", giving rise to diverse "liberationist" movements. They were defined around a single issue of a particular identity, which was allegedly thwarted in developing its full potential because of "oppressive" social relations. Such social relations rooted in class differentiation, sexual identity, social status and gender roles have been oppressive (i.e. unequal). Until they become equal, claims the oppressed group, defining itself around such a category of identity, it cannot be truly free and on equal terms with others. Neuhaus was against such a view of reality. Part of the problem of such cultural politics was the old ideological yearning for a definition of reality according to a single overwhelming principle of organization, and then a demand to transform this reality according to it – in order to set the ruptured reality of social and cultural life straight – and hence fulfil the old myth of overcoming alienation, the Gnostic fantasy of ultimate liberation from the limitations of human existence. Such a human yearning for self-understanding and self-protection stems from a need for ontological safety, this time achieved by one's reasoning from within the fallen human condition in order to master it. In the case of identity politics, this effort should take us outside our existing condition and then recreate it again according to one principle of one's identity, allegedly a proper tool of a just interpretation of human existence. This singular

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[117] R. J. Neuhaus, *President Clinton and the White Race*…, p. 89–90.

dynamic of explanation gives such identity politics and the causes it supports a sense of belonging to and understanding everything and is nearly impossible to dispel by reasoned argument, a truly total *idée fixe*, the essence of ideology.

The charm of such an ideological explanation is an identification with an idea, a theory promising an overcoming of alienation, enabling one to dispense with all efforts at understanding, focusing on the responsible, moral life of a person. An established goal provides all that is there, of the moral theory and morality as such. Focusing on "liberation" theories gives their proponents easy access to such morality and such an understanding of reality, by exposing one dimension of human existence as the sole interpretative tool. Sexual identity, race, class and social status are to provide an insight into the understanding of the whole, enabling one to identify enemies and friends – a dichotomy providing a sense of belonging to the morally righteous. This is an understanding of virtue not in terms of personal responsibility, but virtue by identification, meaning "virtue is not a matter of who you are but of what you stand for".

> Thus in the name of virtuousness that could redeem society and allow for our fulfillment, we created a new 'good' in which private moral responsibility was secondary, if not passé. We created a virtuousness that could be achieved through mere identification. It is a matter of identifying with the right causes and with those who identify with the right causes. But iconography of this sort is even more effective in its negative mode. Because it represents virtue, it also licenses demonization. Those who do not identify are not simply wrong, they are against virtue and therefore evil. Any politics of virtue is also a politics of demonization, and this has been a boomer specialty since the 1960's.[118]

Identity politics is interwoven with an idea of tolerance as a sign of "diversity" contributing to the richness of life. But such tolerance constitutes in fact "the petty intolerance of its infatuation with tolerance, that is intolerance of people who consider such an approach as erroneous and conflict-ridden, people who 'must become like us…' It is the new world of secularism's oppressive tolerance".[119] Ideological identity politics thus corrupts intellectually, but also has deeply epistemological consequences. Such a narrow vision defines the way such ideologues seek and find knowledge, looking at reality solely for a proof of the verity of their dichotomic view. Truth as such becomes just an instrument of our desires to corroborate our longings, meaning truth is being found in a lie, and not where it is and should be.

The Naked Public Square

Neuhaus's contribution to the culture war debate was especially interesting in his criticism of the modern liberal state's attitude towards religion, a practice which Neuhaus famously termed the "naked public square". The "liberation" of the 60s and radical secular modernity accelerated this tendency and threatened the moral order

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[118] Idem, *Bill Clinton and the American Character*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square*…, p. 164. Neuhaus follows this observation about politics of virtue after Shelby Steele.

[119] Idem, *What Then is to Be Done*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square*…, p. 111, 113.

and the free exercise of religion. It was a kind of cultural revolution defined as the final and long awaited freedom, abandoning habits, disciplines and communal life. A "naked public square", a denial of freedom of religion in the public square, was troubling for Neuhaus, because it would eventually elevate the state to a position of an absolute, uncontested sovereign.

The question of the public presence of religion was taken up in modern America by the Supreme Court decision of 1947 in "Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township".[120] It ostensibly concerned issues related to participation by church--affiliated schools in public programs, but it stated in effect, in the voice of Justice Hugo Black who delivered the 5–4 decision, that the First Amendment was meant to create a neutral public sphere. Neuhaus starts by pointing out that this decision led to a secular "sacralization" by the Supreme Court of the "wall of separation" between the state and society, understood as a separation of religion from society and culture.[121] This was only a short step away from concluding, Neuhaus argued, that the aim of the First Amendment was to protect the state and the public space from religion in the name of neutrality and the rights of non-religious people. The whole post-Emerson adjudication thus revolved around the idea that religious people constituted a threat to public order. On the basis of this adjudication, the American liberal elites, especially after the 1960's "liberation" revolution, began to interpret the Constitution and public space in such a way as to slowly push religious people onto the margins of public life. What was crucial here was a new anthropology which undermined the cultural authority of Christianity by the imperial autonomous self as the basis of morality, a self-referential secular moralism. Its creation was connected with a monistic understanding of public values, of which moral equality – and as a consequence a democracy composed of liberated individuals in free association with others – was an ideal and a goal to be strived for. Such individuals have to tolerate all views as equally valid, since any moral hierarchy of goods is nullified; thus words such as tolerance, non-discrimination, or non-judgmentalism became a new (and the only legitimate) vocabulary and "religion" of liberalism. Christianity, a dominant cultural code in America, was immediately put on the defensive and pressured to conform, which meant in effect that it was to be tolerated as long as it changed its teachings or went totally private, out of public sight.[122] Religious people had to accept religion as simply a spiritual department of the liberal state or disappear.

For Neuhaus, the public rise of religiously minded people in America, especially fundamentalist and evangelical Protestants since the 70s, was essentially a self-

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[120] 330 US 1, 1947.

[121] Idem, *The Public Square*…, p. 78; the case was complicated and has caused controversy till today. For a standard liberal-left interpretation of it, see L. Pfeffer, *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township*, [in:] *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States*, ed. K. L. Hall, Oxford 2005, p. 303–304; for a liberal-conservative view see J. Hitchcock, *The Supreme Court and Religion in American Life*, Princeton 2004, p. 121–123.

[122] The process was multidimensional and complicated. See: H. Heclo, *Christianity and American Democracy*, Cambridge Mass 2007, p. 85–104.

-defence move made in the name of freedom and in the name of the community, which in many respects was the same. Religious people, dubbed by the liberal press "the Religious Right", decided to defend their right to participate as religious citizens and act on their convictions in public life and in the 70s entered politics and supported Ronald Reagan in 1980. Neuhaus diagnosed this new situation in 1984 in "The Naked Public Square", the most influential of Neuhaus's books, which brought him to public prominence.[123] Neuhaus was writing shortly after Reagan's victory in 1980, which began the longest conservative ascendancy in modern American history. The Christian Right was part of the Reagan coalition and hated by the liberal elites as a danger to democracy. Whatever the usefulness of the Christian Right to foster democratic discussion, it constituted a defensive move stemming from a recognition that "man has not 'come of age' in the way that many thought. We still need, we more urgently need, the critical tutelage of traditions that refuse to leave 'man on his own'".[124]

The Naked Public Square, a baroque, wordy, ruminative book – both a serious intellectual tract and a kind of passionate polemic – was an instant bestseller presenting a forcefully explained case. The phrase itself permanently entered the language of public discourse. The main thesis is looked upon from different angles, sometimes a disorganized argument. Yet, because of its intellectual depth and range, the book has become one of the most important books of Neuhaus's generation, dealing with a topic of critical importance. He put forward the thesis that religious communities were in fact fighting for a separation of state and church, in a situation where the state had begun to dictate to religious communities their proper social and doctrinal place. It was precisely, argued Neuhaus, a lack of such a separation mandated by the First Amendment which threatened religious communities, subjecting them to public discrimination in traditionally Christian America, while at the very same time naming such a situation "neutrality". He understood that the aim of the First Amendment was partly to protect citizens from domination by uncongenial faiths, but above all from domination by the state itself. This also constituted a guarantee that churches would be protected from the dangerous and tempting situation of courting powerful people running the state.

Neuhaus wrote his book when the Supreme Court religious decisions were beginning to accept a new anthropology of the imperial autonomous self as the sole arbiter of individual rights against community rights. The line between real, inalienable human rights and social rights, increasingly defined by different ideological lobbying groups as human rights, also began to blur. The imperial self was the sole arbiter of his/her "rights", a.k.a. a subjective wish determining what constituted "exclusions" and "intimidations". Such a doctrine could not be an effective policy, but it was an effective battering ram to push the language and actions of religious people from the public square, and to prepare a doctrine of a legitimate new community defined by

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[123] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, San Francisco 1984.

[124] *Ibidem*, p. 93.

secular elites. For Neuhaus, the ultimate question of the "naked public square" was whether Christianity could be part of culture, with religious citizens fully participating in public life. Religious freedom, if this concept means anything, has to include communal functioning of religion. Religion is communal because it is not private, but personal. The real challenge is not only to keep the faith but to hand it down to the next generation. This is essentially a communal, public activity, even if not a state activity, carried out inside autonomous institutions which have a right to operate undisturbed within the public square: families, churches themselves, and charitable and educational organizations.[125]

If religious freedom means anything, argued Neuhaus, it cannot be reconciled with liberal monism treating the imperial autonomous self as an uncontested basis. When imposed on all autonomous institutions and their legitimate *modus operandi* by the state, treating it as the only legitimate public anthropology, it simply becomes the anthropology of the state – a totalitarian ideology. If such a monistic liberalism becomes an ideology of the state, pointed out Neuhaus, it inexorably tries to squeeze religion, including the mediating institutions of churches, out of the public square. We arrive at a situation in which the government becomes the ultimate tool of defining the social, economic, cultural and moral life of its citizens. Civil society becomes limited and subordinated to the state. The jealous state begins to function as the sole point of identity of citizenry, defining at the same time the legitimate and illegitimate beliefs of such identity. This is a doctrine, argued Neuhaus, which is utterly against a republican government of ordered liberty, founded on an independent civil society and its autonomous way of defining aims apart from the state.

Neuhaus observes that Christianity is never to be found apart from a cultural matrix. Christianity is in all its forms "enculturated", meaning that in relation to culture, the Church is both acting and being acted on, shaped and shaping it. The Church, broadly defined by Neuhaus as "the Christian movement through time", can sometimes adopt a way of

[…] being in the world which is deliberately indifferent to the culture of which it is a part. That indifference results in the Church unconsciously adopting and thereby reinforcing, in the name of the gospel, patterns of culture that are incompatible with her gospel.[126]

He is aware that worrying about this cultural conformity of Christianity has a long history in Christian thinking.[127] Neuhaus knows that in contemporary Ame-

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[125] In order to have religious freedom, it is not enough to have a "warm heart" in private life, it is necessary to have the communal setting in which such a "warm heart" of religious rights can operate. See also: R. L. Wilken, *The Christian Intellectual Tradition*, "First Things", June–July 1991.

[126] R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ Without Culture*, "First Things", April 2007, p. 56.

[127] Saint Paul in Rom. 12: 2 wrote "be not confronted to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind". In the third century, Tertullian asked a defiant question: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" In modern times, the question is especially dramatic, with Christianity having a self-conscious attitude of being confronted with a modern liberal, anti-Christian world. Kierkegaard's withering critique of culturally domesticated discipleship or Karl Barth's emphatic *Nein!*

rica there are also principled – both left and right wing – nonconformity groups of Christians who are reviving, or trying to revive in theological and moral discourse, a model of "Christ against culture", which in particular means "Christ against American culture". Such phenomena testify to a worldwide observation that religion, Christianity in particular, is not disappearing, that *homo religious*,

> […] man in search of transcendent meaning, is irrepressible. The secularization theories that held sway over our high culture for three hundred years, ever since the Enlightenment, have been falsified by the very history to which they so confidently appealed and yet the Enlightenment prognosis of secularization may not be falsified in its entirety. While religion is certainly not withering away, one may wonder whether it is fulfilling the second part of the prognosis, namely that the 'Christ without culture' model is impotent, and quite prosperously happy in its impotence, when it comes to exercising cultural influence. [In America today] there is a greater awareness of the public influence of religion. But that awareness is almost entirely centered on the political influence of religious voters and activists, leading to alarmist cries of a threatening theocracy. [But] Christianity in America is not challenging the 'habits of the heart' and 'habits of mind' that dominate American culture, meaning both the so called high culture and the popular culture. On the contrary some of the most flourishing forms of Christianity not only do not challenge those habits; they exhibit a wondrous capacity to exploit them, and thus to reinforce them.[128]

Neuhaus shows how the Christian orthodoxy has been subtly transformed by modern liberal culture and how it has adapted to it. "Self-esteem", "identity", "well-being", "prosperity", and "happiness" are the symbolic words testifying to the fact that worshippers and preachers resist anything which contradicts this state of affairs, for instance suffering and unhappiness, as diseases to be immediately rectified. Self-criticism with an awareness of the limitations of life are considered as dangerous thoughts. Putting off self-gratification and consumption is treated as being contrary to human rights. Christianity and its orthodoxy become, from such a perspective, a mirror of society, its habits of heart and mind, even if participants think that they are challenging or escaping them. As

> […] everything goes better with Coke, so everything goes better with Jesus, and, if that doesn't work, there is always Prozac. The chat that such religious enterprise presents itself as 'evangelization', should not mislead us. Despite the talk about a religious resurgence or revival, the percentage of the population characterized by a disciplined commitment to Christ and by active engagement in Christian service to the Church and the world has not grown appreciably. Religious entrepreneurs are increasingly competing for niche markets within a stable population that prefers religion to Prozac, or prefers Prozac with a panache of religion. There is, to be sure, the undeniable reality of the culture wars. Christians not only voting their moral convictions but, especially with respect to the conflict between the culture of life, and the culture of death, making truth claims and advancing arguments in terms of public reason aimed at engaging the centers of cultural influence. But it is an exception. The centers of cultural influence [in America] do not recognize that they are being challenged by Christians, except for the allegedly theocratic challenge in electoral politics. They do not recognize that they are being intellectually, conceptually and culturally challenged , in largest part because Christians are not persuasively articulating such

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thrown in the face of the *Kulturprotestantismus* – that was the form taken by the 'Christ of culture' model in liberal Protestantism – were the most dramatic examples of that worry.

[128] R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ Without Culture…*, p. 57.

a challenge. Their complaint is that Christians are trying to 'impose their values' on them. They do not understand that we want to engage them in a civil argument about the possibility of moral truth, about what kind of people we are and should aspire to be, and therefore about how we ought to order our life together. They do not understand that, because so few Christians understand and attempt to practice such engagement […] John Paul II said 'The Church imposes nothing; she only proposes'. But what she proposes she believes to be truth […] Of course, it is true that many people will reject the proposal, and many will simply refuse to be engaged by it. They simply *know* that, no matter how winsomely proposed, the conversation with Christianity is but a cunningly disguised threat of imposing on their freedom. Their default position, so to speak, is one of methodological, if not metaphysical, atheism. Any reference to God or transcendent truth, any proposal associated with religion is a threat to the autonomous self and to the achievements of a rigorous secular modernity. They live in what Max Weber called 'a disenchanted world', and they are determined to keep it that way .[129]

Such a mindset, points out Neuhaus, is powerfully influential in liberal culture today. Karl Marx once identified the people who had it as those who "control the commanding heights of economies". Today they (the liberal elites) are the people who control "the commanding heights of culture", and even if they may constitute the minority of the population, they succeed in presenting themselves as "the mainstream" through the control of powerful institutions such as the media, entertainment, the arbitration of literary tastes, the great research universities and professional associations, with business and advertising seeking their approval. Neuhaus thinks that is necessary to remind such people that they are a minority in America by defeating them in electoral politics. But such victories are shallow since they immediately intensify alarms that "the theocrats are coming", reinforcing the convictions of the people on "the commanding heights of culture" that their defeats corroborate their fears and that they should resist such "populist" uprisings against the hegemony of their enlightened ways.[130] Neuhaus realizes that Christians often correctly view those who control "the commanding heights of culture" as political opponents since they usually view Christians that way. Theirs is a world view that is monistic and totalitarian in its implications, stemming from the new liberalism's slogan of "personal is political", where all human relations are looked upon essentially as relations of unequal power in need of "liberation", from religious "oppression" as well. Such an approach means that "politics is the name of the game", a kind of Leninist "Who whom?" (Who does what to whom?), a merciless fight until opponents submit. For Neuhaus, the liberal opponents of "theocracy" are secular fanatics themselves.

This monistic version of contemporary liberalism means the establishment of an ideology as a mandatory standard of judgment in the public square. It wants to see its ideas, passions, policies and all idiosyncrasies as wholly innocent of negative consequences. Neuhaus, a person of faith, cannot imagine any accommodation with such a monistic liberalism as a way of perceiving reality and engages it in the public square. But this monistic system of thought leads to liberal fanaticism, excluding any plurality of language, institutions and political life as such. Then electoral victories

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[129] *Ibidem*, p. 56.
[130] *Ibidem*.

are just inconsequential victories of the moment. The most important battlefield is, claims Neuhaus

> the great contest over culture, the guiding ideas and habits of mind and heart that informs the way we understand the world and our place in it. Christians who, knowingly or unknowingly, embrace the model of 'Christ without culture' are captive to the culture as defined by those who control its commanding heights. They are not only captive to it but are complicit in it. Their entrepreneurial success in building religious empires by exploiting the niche markets of the Christian subculture leaves the commanding heights untouched, unchallenged, unengaged. Christianity does indeed have its own culture, its own intellectual tradition, its own liturgy and songs, its own moral teachings and distinctive ways of life, both personal and communal. The Church must carefully cultivate that culture and, in times of severe persecution, cultivate it, if need be, in the catacombs. But that is not our time in America, although there are Christians who, embracing the model of 'Christ against culture', invite us to take refuge in the catacombs of their own imagining. A rich ecclesiastical culture, a distinctively Christian way of being in the world, sometimes finds itself positioned against the world as the world is defined by those who are hostile to the influence of the Church. But even when the Church is against the world, she is against the world for the world.[131]

If the Church "imposes nothing, she only proposes", what does it (she) propose? For Neuhaus, St. Paul stated this at the end of I Corinthians 12: "a more excellent way", a challenge to the imperial self, a call to heroic life. This call is not so much a message "as a person, the one who is the way, the truth, and the life".[132] Neuhaus insists that the Christian proposal of "a more excellent way" is not just one option among others, although "it must be freely chosen". It is not, he insists, an option for those who might be interested. In America religion flourishes, observed Neuhaus. But it is largely of the Christ-without–culture variety. That is why there have been no distinctive Christian contributions that deserve, as he writes, to command the attention of the cultural gatekeepers of America, in literature, the arts, in music and entertainment, in political philosophy and the humanities. Distinctly Christian cultural products typically cater to the Christian market, but they "are not proposals of a more excellent way for American culture". This is a defeat in the face of an adversary who considers the anthropology of the imperial self to be public language and political order.[133] Neuhaus rejects the

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[131] *Ibidem*, p. 58.

[132] *Ibidem*.

[133] Neuhaus is arguing here not only with a flourishing niche of Catholic culture in America but also with a large section of Protestant evangelicals, and cultural conservatives in general. All these groups have been in politics since the 90s and have often been victorious, but failed culturally and decided to go back to their niche culture without an ambition of influencing outside culture. Thus Paul Weyrich, the head of the Free Congress Foundation, one of the most important conservative political organizers, lamented conservatives' failure to address the cultural issues. In an open letter to conservatives in February 1999, he argued that it was time for religious conservatives to withdraw from national politics in order to concentrate on problems of their own communities, on problems of faith, family and community. Politics was not a successful vehicle for changing culture. Weyrich was not clear whether he advocated withdrawal from the mainstream culture or simpy a tactical retreat. He wrote that "we probably have lost the culture war. That does not mean the war is not going on to continue, and that it isn't going to be fought on other fronts. But in terms of society in general, we have lost. This is why, even

Christ without culture approach, the model which induces contentment with being a subculture. But Christianity that is indifferent to its cultural context is captive to its cultural context. Indeed, it reinforces the cultural definitions to which it is captive. Nowhere is this so evident as in the ready Christian acceptance of the cultural dogma that religion is essentially a private matter of spiritual experience. Against that assumption, we must insist that Christian faith is intensely personal but never private. The Christian gospel is an emphatically public proposal about the nature of the world and our place in it. Many Christians, possibly most Christians, have uncritically accepted the dichotomy between public and private, between fact and value, between knowledge and meaning.[134]

True, these dichotomies are entrenched in American religion and culture as such, and associated with American individualism. In high culture, this understanding of religion as private and subjective was presented in William James's classic "Varieties of Religious Experience".[135] But as subjective experience it cannot lay claim, by definition, to public proposition. It cannot be translated into a rational public language, since it is by definition a province of subjective emotional and psychological reactions to the emptiness of the cosmos – and thus solitude. Such a language cannot for this reason have a legitimate status in culture, in public life. It has to be consigned to the private domain of personal feeling.[136] For some, as Neuhaus points out, such a subjective understanding of religion was the reality of American religious experience from the beginning, and James just captured this phenomenon in a more philosophical way. For them, this is essentially a post-Christian attitude, pushing consciousness into a religion of "me", already visible in the Transcendentalist movement and the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote that it is by yourself, without an ambassador, that God speaks to you. It is God within you

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when we win in politics, our victories fail to translate into the kind of policies we believe are important. Therefore, what seems to me a legitimate strategy to follow is to look at ways to separate ourselves from the institutions that have been captured by the ideology of Political Correctness or by other enemies of our traditional culture. I would like to point out to you that the word 'holy' means 'set apart', and that it is not against our tradition to be, in fact, 'set apart'. You can look at Christian history. You will see that there were times when those who had our beliefs were definitely in the minority and it was a band of hardy monks who preserved culture while the surrounding society disintegrated". *An Open Letter to Conservatives*, [in:] *Conservatism in America since 1930*, ed. G. L. Schneider, New York 2003, p. 430. See also similar observations by another important conservative activist, R. A. Viguerie, *Conservatives Betrayed*, Los Angeles 2006, p. 101–114.

[134] R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ Without Culture…*, p. 58.

[135] James defined religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whether they may consider the divine". In such an understanding of religion, as Neuhaus points out, "church, community, doctrine, tradition, morality – all of these are secondary and, as often as not, hindrances to genuine religion. Genuine religion is subjective experience, and subjective experience is solitude". R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ Without Culture*…, p. 58.

[136] This is one of the demands of such modern liberal canonical – even if different – thinkers as John Rawls or Jurgen Habermas, to "translate" private language into a public objective in order to clear a debris of false, unverifiable, non-objective standards – of which religion was a part – from human consciousness. See a liberal canonical work by J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge Mass. 1971; for a good criticism of such a liberal monism, see: J. Kekes, *The Illusions of Egalitarianism*, Ithaca 2003.

that responds to God without, which essentially amounts to total moral freedom.[137] But this "religion" of the imperial self, realizes Neuhaus, also corrupts and relativizes morality. Since moral autonomy is God, and God is moral autonomy, then so is morality. The main moral problem then is an inability to discern, and defend moral truth as such, a universal system of reference transcending the whimsical wishes of the imperial self. This relativist stance, shows Neuhaus, makes one believe that morality is a purely individual matter, or a consensual endeavour, varying from age to age, from society to society, precisely because it varies from person to person. This is the politically correct position of liberal monism today, which treats creedal religions as a scandal of illegitimate thinking. One of the consequences is an inability to justify moral revulsions in universal terms, paradoxically at a time when liberal society is saturated with" moral" revulsions at moral "hard" truths, while promoting the "hard" truths of "good" social causes. As a result morality is turned into "good" social causes, the content of which is defined, arbitrarily for a given day and place, by those occupying the "commanding heights of culture".[138] In such a situation, creedal religions and traditional morality are treated as threatening arrogance, oppression, scandal and menace ready to be imposed on someone else. Christianity is pressured into the province of mild morality of "goodness" with Jesus as one of the great human teachers.[139] This attack on creedal religions as irrational, in the name of the imperial self, had been challenged, observed Neuhaus. The Enlightenment settlement

> […] that imposed a public truce with respect to the truths that really matter, divorcing fact from value, knowledge from meaning, and faith from reason, is being boldly challenged [and] that challenge is being pressed most boldly by the Bishop of Rome, Pope Benedict, who in the name of de-Hellenizing Christianity, pit biblical faith against the great synthesis of faith and reason achieved over the centuries of the Christian intellectual tradition [and] also challenged non-Christian intellectuals to free themselves from the truncated and stifling definition of rationality imposed by the Enlightenment. In

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[137] Harold Bloom called this type of religion an American 'Gnosticism' – a belief, as Neuhaus wrote, that "each individual possesses a divine spark and salvation consists in the liberation of that divine spark from the body and from the particularities of its constraints in history and cultural space". Bloom, in turn, wrote: "Unlike most countries, [Americans] have no overt national religion; but a partly concealed one has been developing among us for two centuries now. It is almost purely experimental, and despite its insistences [to the contrary], it is scarcely Christian in any traditional way. A religion of the self burgeons, under many names, and seeks to know its own inwardness, in isolation. What the American self has found, since about 1800, is its own freedom – from the world, from time, from other selves". Quoted in R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ without Culture…*, p. 59.

[138] A good analysis of that attitude can be found in K. Minogue, *The Epicureans*, [in:] *Survival of Culture*: Permanent Values in a Virtual Age, ed. H. Kramer, Chicago 2002.

[139] Neuhaus' stance was close, of course, to C. S. Lewis' stance in *Mere Christianity,* when the latter stated that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, whose claim was either true or false: "Jesus may be a liar or a lunatic, or he may be the Lord, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. You must make a choice. When Jesus is just a human teacher, and the imperial self is the agency of getting to the core of existence than we have here a kind of Pelagianism, in a secular garb, one of the greatest Christian heresies". Quoted in: C. C. Campbell, *Jesus Christ Superfluous*, "First Things", April 2005, p. 45.

these and many other ways, the case is advanced that Christianity is a public proposal within the realm of authentically public discourse, and requiring decisions of immeasurable consequences, both personal and cultural. In different times and in different places, the Church has understood its relationship to culture in different ways. There is Christ against culture, the Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ transforming culture. H. Richard Niebuhr's useful taxonomy can be expanded and modified. The one model that is not possible, except by deluding ourselves and betraying the Church's proposal to the world, is Christ without culture.[140]

Neuhaus puts his argument in a historical context, showing how the move of Protestant evangelicals into politics was essentially a self-defensive action, which alarmed liberal, progressive mainline/oldline Protestant Churches and the progressive wing of the Catholic Church as well as the secular, post 1968 liberals.[141] The mainline, liberal Churches were surprised that the fundamentalist and evangelical Protestants entered politics, which they had left in the aftermath of their defeat in the Scopes Trial of 1925.[142] The consequences of the split reached far beyond the churches, since it constituted one of the first instances in America of a culture war. Fundamentalism itself has been associated with "bigotry, intolerance, and abysmal ignorance" and with a subconscious fear of it being obsessed with the "theocratic" order in America.[143] But while those who controlled the "commanding heights of culture" were not looking, fundamentalists spent decades rebuilding their morale and institutions until, toward the end of World War II, they were confident enough to reappear in public, now calling themselves not fundamentalists but "neo-evangelicals". Within a fairly short time, the "neo" was dropped and America was faced with a maddeningly diverse and rapidly growing network of churches, "parachurch" movements, and entrepreneurial spiritual empires referred to as evangelical Protestantism or – with increasing frequency – just evangelicalism.

However, many of them prefer to be identified simply as "Christian".[144]

In principle, the victorious mainline/oldline Protestant churches advocated a connection between faith and action, including political action, arguing that religio-

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[140] R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ without Culture…*, p. 59–60.

[141] See on that: I. Kristol, *Taking the Religious Conservatives Seriously*, [in:] *Disciples and Democracy: Religious Conservatives and the Future of American Democracy*, ed. M. Cromartie, Washington DC 2005, p. VII–VIII.

[142] The term 'fundamentalist' was connected with a series of monographs entitled *The Fundamentals*. They were written between 1910–1915 by scholars at major universities in Germany, Scotland and England, and focused on the erosion of Christian doctrine by certain forms of 'biblical criticism' and the implications of the naturalist interpretations of the Darwinian theory of evolution for the Biblical message. However, in the 1920's, H. L. Mencken and others derided fundamentalists as 'yokels', 'rustic ignoramuses' and 'anthropoid rabble' (and used other quasi-racist epithets as well) and this stereotype stuck. Since then, the battle has continued between 'modernists' or liberal 'social gospel' churches, as well as secular liberals on the one side and the 'fundamentalists' on the other. The fundamentalists lost the fight over the control of the oldline churches and were forced out from public life and consigned to the niche of backward, rural regions, mainly in the South.

[143] R. J. Neuhaus, *Catholic Matters: Confusion, Controversy, and the Splendor of Truth*, New York 2006, p. 6–7.

[144] *Ibidem*, p. 7–8.

us convictions could not be relegated to one sphere and political activities to another. But Christian faith was now mainly focused on social justice. The key elements of this "social gospel" activity for justice, however, began to be associated with the aims of liberal America, including a recognition of a democratic liberal regime as the best regime in which Christian justice could be realized, and freedom, including religious freedom, secured. This reasoning was based on a conviction that in a democratic society only individual social actions could make a real difference. Metaphysical, pietistic concerns were to be relegated to a second division. The progress of the Christian "social gospel" in congruence with the American democratic regime was the aim. Criticism of those who maintained no particular social or political responsibilities became the standard policy of the mainstream Protestant churches.[145] Pietistic relegation of salvation to the individual's relation with God – as advocated by the fundamentalists and evangelicals – betrayed the basic Christian claim, according to the mainline Protestant churches, that God was the God of all creation and still creating the world in time, whose tool was a democratic liberal state realizing the goals of progressive Christianity. Indifference to injustices, social and political, was condemned and a call to action made it easy to claim that the American regime was fulfilling the conditions for such actions, making the "world safe for democracy".

Pietists responded by appealing to their theological convictions and the Constitutional "wall of separation between church and state", claiming that while upholding freedom of religion, the church "claims no competency in matters political".[146] But such an interpretation, claimed the progressives, was drastically individualistic, and the First Amendment did not prohibit Christians, both as individuals and institutionally in churches, from influencing their societies or governments. Suddenly in the 70s the message of Christian political activity reached the fundamentalist Christians, who emerged from their "caves" and entered politics in the name of making a better society. The mainstream stance won, but to the surprise of the mainline Protestant churches and the horror of secular liberals. The mainstream Protestant attitude won in the most forgotten "backwater" of American Christianity, among people with anachronistic – so the mainstream Protestants thought – theology and reactionary social policies. It was

> […] not a victory they [were] celebrating. For it turn[ed] out that once politically inactive Christians became active, the causes they supported were not those the mainstream wanted or supported. The temptation [has been] to defeat this new political activism by using the slogans of the past, that 'religion and politics do not mix', or that 'one should not try to force one's religious views on anyone through public policy' but to do so was to go against the position the mainstream has been arguing for years.[147]

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[145] For an excellent exposition of this process, see R. M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation*, Wilmington 2003, p. 49–68.

[146] S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America*, [in:] *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. J. Berkman, M. Cartwright, Durham 2001, p. 462.

[147] S. Haurewas, *A Christian Critique*…, p. 463.

This was so because this entrance into politics was not in the name of "justice", "progress', or a "cause", which was defined by liberals and mainline Protestant churches as the only legitimate mode of public engagement.[148] The liberals, or by European standards, the liberal left, who monopolized and redefined the meaning of liberalism after 1968 to incorporate into it ideas of "emancipation" and the anthropology of the imperial self, battled the conservative Christian Right on ideological and constitutional grounds. Ideologically, they thought their idea of progressive politics was the only legitimate one. Constitutionally, the participation of the Religious Right (mainly evangelicals, but also conservative Catholics, and later some orthodox Jews) threatened the allegedly established tradition of the separation of state and religion. Religion was to be banned for constitutional reasons from the public square, which was to be devoid of religiously grounded arguments and values. A more sinister justification for such a radical separation, a.k.a. elimination of religion from the public square, gradually entered the public language following the "Engels vs. Vitale" Supreme Court decision of 1947, which, contrary to the American constitutional understanding defined religion as uniquely problematic politically and morally in a liberal democracy. The latter, defined as an ideal regime, was to realize the only progressive moral vision, to which all churches should be subject, as indeed the mainline churches had been, with their "social gospel" and therapeutic, spiritual teachings. Because religion allegedly fostered divisiveness, the liberal state had to keep it private, or otherwise problems would abound.[149] Behind such thinking, there was a much more dangerous idea that religion could function under such conditions as the state sovereign would allow it to function, meaning that religion was a province of state sovereignty, not a force outside of it – essentially the ancient Roman concept of religion. But from the Christian point of view, the ways in which Caesar – or the state or any other worldly institution – acted was to be subjected to outside moral judgment, the very principle destroying political tyranny per se.

Neuhaus's "The Naked Public Square" located itself at the intersection of these discussions, with an assertion of public, non-liberal Christian activism as a necessary ingredient. He saw the bankruptcy of the mainline liberal churches, which had abandoned Christian orthodoxy and more or less become departments of liberal progressive causes. The liberal democracy Neuhaus had in mind was not the monistic type, which began to be understood as the definitive type post-1968. Writing in the tradition of Reinhold Niebuhr and John Courtney Murray, he did not consider liberal--democratic political theory to be the best. Neuhaus, as an Augustinian, understood it as approximately the best arrangement so far – a good way of realizing goals most suited to forming the proper consciences of people. Democracy was a value dependent on the pre-political sources of its successful, freedom-oriented operation. Chri-

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[148] For instance, to claim as Jerry Falwell of the "Moral Majority" that he was leading the same fight for justice as Martin Luther King was once leading was an abhorrent thing for mainline "social gospel" churches, let alone secular liberals.

[149] See: G. V. Bradley, *Religious Liberty in the American Republic*, Washington 2008, p. 113–120.

stianity was here the most important source, thwarting the emergence of the monistic sovereign state. It was precisely this evolution of liberal democracy in the wake of the 1968 transformation which made such a monistic type of a regime with a total sovereignty over the lives of citizens, including the spiritual sphere, possible.

For Niebuhr, democracy was the best regime which institutionalized Christian social philosophy. He opposed the limited understanding of Christian doctrine in relation to the liberal state as practised by the theologians and the Protestant mainline churches, and the socially optimistic idea that liberal progress was an ally of Christianity. Democracy was at this point in history just the most appropriate form of government imaginable. What he criticized was the inadequate liberal justification for a democratic regime, which the mainline Protestant Christianity accepted with its progressive optimism, disregarding the realistic account of human nature by orthodox Christianity.[150] For Murray, America became an important subject of the Christian project: since the Declaration of Independence, the foundational document of America had been Christian, in fact Catholic, in character. The American regime was thus supported best when Christian anthropology and ethics provided it with the necessary basis for its successful operation. America, if it strayed from this ideal, could be amenable to Catholic social theory "by interpreting the separation of church and state as a confession by the state of its incompetence in matters of religion".[151] For Murray, American democracy could be sustained only by the Catholic theory of natural law, also written in the Declaration, since its moral and political identity defined by natural law is antecedent to its actual constitutional framework. It could be sustained only by the Catholic theory of natural law, because it was by implication the only alternative to the alienating, destructive individualism of Locke and Hobbes.[152] Neuhaus shared Niebuhr's and Murray's approach to public life, democracy

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[150] For Niebuhr, the "Christian view of human nature was more adequate for the development of a democratic society than either the optimism with which democracy has become historically associated or the moral cynicism which inclines human communities to tyrannical political strategies". R. Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, New York 1944, p. XIII. Niebuhr remained throughout World War II a firm supporter of democracy as a social system that best embodies the Christian understanding of man, although he dampened down his idolization of it by the end of the war; see also S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America*…, p. 466; for a criticism of Niebuhr's thinking, which was interpreted to be overly optimistic and idolatrous towards democracy, despite his disclaimers – a criticism which was leveled against Neuhaus too – see R. Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*, New York 1985, p. 22.

[151] S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America*…, p. 467; see J. C. Murray's articles, *The Church and Totalitarian Democracy* and *Leo XIII: Separation of Church and State*, "Theological Studies" 1953, No. 13–14. At the same time Catholics could be amenable to America, since Catholics "can enthusiastically support democracy as an imaginative solution to the problem of religious pluralism"; the argument was developed in J. C. Murray's book *We Hold These Truths*, New York, p. 60.

[152] J. C. Murray, *We Hold These Truths*…, p. 308; it is interesting that Murray's book was published in 1956, one year after Leo Strauss's *Natural Right in History,* in which he argued that America is indeed Lockean and Hobbesian, that the natural law was rejected by the Founding Fathers in favour of natural rights, individualistic and autonomous, and that the liberal regime was in need of support because of its shortcomings.

and America, but his argument was more nuanced. Neuhaus asserted that culture was at the root of politics, and religion was the root of culture. The primacy of politics over culture was disastrous; it essentially meant a refusal to recognize a normative, universally bound ethic, a reality of public virtue as standing above the political command.[153]

Neuhaus pointed out that the crisis of liberal democracy in America stemmed from the fact that religion had been excluded from public life. This was an instance of an individual being isolated from the mediating structures, with no power to resist the omnipotent, bureaucratic state.[154] This is not necessarily a novel idea. It was visible in Tocqueville and articulated earlier by Hegel.[155] To prevent the totalitarian pretensions of the bureaucratic, liberal state aiming at homogenizing natural communities, including communities of faith, it was necessary, claimed Neuhaus, to mend the

[…] rupture between public policy and moral sentiment. But the only moral sentiment of public effect is the sentiment that is embodied in and reinforced by living tradition. There are no a-religious moral traditions of public, or at least of democratic, force in American life. This is not to say that morality must be embodied in religion nor that the whole of religion is morality. It is to say that, among the American people, religion and morality are conjoined. With the effective disestablishment of the coercive power of religion, religion has become part of culture. So close is the union that they are sometimes indistinguishable. Religion in our popular life is the morality-bearing part of culture, and in that sense the heart of culture.[156]

This challenge of the bureaucratic pretensions of the monistic liberal state has been powerful enough to change culture and establish its own "religion" of alleged secular "neutrality". There have been philosophical and legal efforts to "isolate and exclude the religious dimension of culture". The liberal state tries to shape culture in order to cleanse it of religious content and to be the source of "compulsory authority". It has used its institutions, for instance, the judicial system or public state education, since the 18th century. This is the logic of monistic sovereignty, speeded up by the 1968 revolution when the state became an agent of "liberation" from all real and imaginable "oppressions", including the oppression of culture, which has been defined as exclusively a province of power. After 1968, classical liberalism incorporated and used this "liberation" ideology to "liberate" all kinds of "oppressed" minorities, not only legally but culturally, also changing "oppressive" language constructs. The state has collaborated here with other public institutions like the media. They aim at power, not information any more. In such a situation those

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[153] In the *Naked Public Square* Neuhaus deliberately and provocatively shows how both Martin Luther King Jr. and Jerry Falwell, both in their own time, challenged the status quo and state pretensions to omnipotence.

[154] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 83–86.

[155] For Hegel "absolute freedom requires homogeneity. It cannot brook differences which would prevent everyone participating totally in the decisions of the society. It requires some near unanimity of will to emerge from this deliberation, for otherwise the majority would just be imposing its will on the minority and freedom would not be universal". Ch. Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge 1979, p. 114–115; S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America…*, p. 468.

[156] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 154–155.

[…] who desire a neatly unitary social order, the most problematic 'loose cannon' on the deck is religion. That is because, of all institutions in society, only religion can invoke against the state a transcendent authority and have its invocation seconded by 'the people' to whom a democratic state is presumably accountable. For the state to be secured from such challenge, religion must be redefined as a private, emphatically *not* public, phenomenon. In addition, because truly value-less existence is impossible for persons or societies, the state must displace religion as the generator and bearer of values. Therefore it must screen out of public discourse and decision-making those values too closely associated with religion, lest public recognition be given to a source of moral authority other than the state itself. In the eyes of the state the dangerous child today is not the child who points out that the emperor has no clothes but the child who sees that the emperor's garments of moral authority have been stolen from the religion he has sent into exile from the public square.[157]

There were critics claiming that Neuhaus's criticism was powerful but he did not provide an adequate response, since he continued to "support the political and economic presumptions that are the source of the difficulty".[158] Whatever the short-comings of the book, it shattered the complacency of the liberal world. The public response to it surprised even Neuhaus. The book defined a new language in the public discourse about politics and religion. Shortly before his death, Neuhaus stated that the book was an argument and like most arguments it

[…] had to wait its time to get a hearing. Books that become something of a point of reference appear at the edge of a time when a lot of people are already persuaded of the argument but have not quite put it together. The 'Aha! Experience' That's what I've been thinking". [But] those who are unsympathetic to the argument are more likely to say, That's just what I suspected *they* were thinking. Who was the 'we' and who the 'they' [in 1984]. 'We' were then, and, for the most part, still are, liberals of one kind or another. The then-emerging 'they' was what was called and is still called 'the religious right'. The book was in large part a response to the question: What are 'they' saying that 'we' got wrong, and what should be done about it? [Today] many of those who were once 'they' are now 'we'. The growing public influence of politically engaged conservative Christians has frequently been accompanied by an immersion in the theory and practice of democratic politics. Theirs is no longer simply an aggressive defense against those who once made up the rules that excluded them. [Then], the very phrase 'religion and public life' was highly controversial. In that combination they were fighting words. Today there are numerous institutes, academic centers, and publications established on the almost taken for granted premise that we cannot understand this society or sustain this polity without engaging the cultural and religious dynamics that shape the "We the people" that is the locus of political sovereignty. [But] many of the 'we' are [today] less worried about being viewed as 'they'. Those who are most militantly committed to the ideology of the naked public square have of late taken to raising alarms about the threat of 'neoconservatives', 'theoconservatives', and even of 'theocrats'. This is for the most part the last

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[157] *Ibidem*, p. 155.

[158] S. Haurewas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America*…, p. 468. This criticism may be correct but it does not point out that the main object of Neuhaus's criticism is the omnipotent sovereign state created in the 15–16th century. He rightly recognized that Christianity, because of the Augustinian distinction, might be the only barrier to its totalitarian pretensions. What should be the practical means of securing the plurality of autonomous worlds is another matter. It might be that Neuhaus's proposition, including the idealistic view that people of good will should engage in civil argument over the common good, is utopian. But the essence of his analysis – the danger of modern sovereignty – is correct. He should be more honest and admit that Christianity, especially the Catholic Church, is the only barrier to such a sovereignty, opposed by the secular liberal state because it is exactly the only contender worthy of the name.

gaps – although it may be a very long last gap – of those who would deny the self-evident truth that this constitutional order is not sustainable apart from the cultural, moral, and religious expression of the self-evident truths on which it is founded.[159]

Neuhaus challenged the "secular city" as the reigning ideology of the post-1968 liberal democratic order. Its implications, if not countered, would create a public – and as a consequence – private world destined to become, as one of the commentators said, like Narnia under the rule of the White Queen: a place where "there is always winter but never Christmas", never hope and never freedom.[160] Neuhaus's goal was not to replace the "secular city", as his ideological opponents stated, with a "religious city". The "naked public square" was not to be replaced with the "sacred public square". He was a staunch believer in religious freedom, deliberative democracy and political equality. The idea of any establishment of religion was for him tantamount to a heretical nullification of the crucial Christian distinction between *sacrum* and *profanum,* the City of Man and the City of God, the highest form of idolatry. But for the same reasons, he opposed the pseudo-religion of modern ideologies, of which liberal monistic secularism was one. Religious theocracy was no different in kind from the secular liberal "theocracy" of the self-imposed elites as alleged bearers of wisdom about the meaning of reality, trying to impose this monistic ideology as the official state "religion". His was the ideal of the civic, republican public square in which all voices are examined within a civilized circle of moral conversation. In this public square, religiously informed reason bearing an insight into the reality of human existence is recognized as a legitimate voice of conversation, without which human self-understanding is truncated and without which justice and human happiness are not possible.

In such a liberal civic public square, people do not split their personalities into allegedly "neutral", "unencumbered" rational selves. This is a classical case of John Rawls "original position". The public space of "neutral" selves is a totally utopian project in need of state bureaucracy paternalism. In the case of religious people, it would require a radical separation of their religiously informed consciences from their "rationally neutral" informed and shaped consciences. This is, claimed Neuhaus, a utopian, morally artificial and politically dangerous project. People as personalities shaped by their cultures – at the root of which is a religious understanding of reality which is not a "false consciousness" but a legitimate way of gaining an insight into the reality of human life – should, according to Neuhaus, draw on wisdom from every tradition they come from, to order life according to the common good as decently as they can. A proper ordering of public life is thus, pointed out Neuhaus, a profoundly moral enterprise applied to the cultural and political arrangement of people. Religiously informed insights are crucial to it and must be recognized as a legitimate part

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[159] R. J. Neuhaus, *Afterword*, [in:] *The Naked Public Square Reconsidered: Religion and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Ch. Wolfe, Wilmington 2009, p. 189–190.

[160] B. Miner in edited by him *Good Order: Right Answers to Contemporary Questions*, New York 1995, p. 58.

of the public square through a democratically exercised conversation of people who have such insights. This is the meaning of Neuhaus's often repeated adage, taken from Elliott, that "Culture is the root of politics, and religion is the root of culture". Neuhaus is also led by an Augustinian belief that public life is nothing, if it does not lead people to such a conversation which best shapes their moral consciences, so they can justly order their lives together, pursue the common good and lead meaningful lives – by which he means reaching the best possible understanding of the Whole, the truth of Being. His is the heroic conviction that

> […] whenever you are as certain about something as I am, go forward with me; whenever you hesitate, seek with me; whenever you discover that you have gone wrong, come back to me; or, if I have gone wrong, call me back to you. In this way, we will travel along the street of love together as we make our way toward Him of whom it is said, 'Seek His face always'.[161]

For Neuhaus, the so-called "strict separationism" between religion and the public square – the aim of the liberal secularists – was totalitarian in its implications. They would eventually have to use power, real or symbolic, judicial or executive, cutting people off from their chances of truly understanding their predicament. For instance, the judicial disenfranchisement of people of faith from participation in public life only if they violate their personal beliefs constitutes an imposition of idolatrous liberal ideological orthodoxy as a new "religion". The separation of the church from the state was taken for granted by Neuhaus. His aim was not a "Christian America" – an accusation he adamantly rejected. The state should not tell the religious communities how to perceive reality, he claimed, and the religious communities should not operate government institutions. His message, as one observer noted, coming from his teachers Rabbi Heschel and Martin Luther King, was that "the separation of church and state should never be twisted to mean the separation of religion and religiously informed moral witness from public life".[162]

Ostensibly, Neuhaus – still a Lutheran pastor – began with a nuanced assessment of the political ascent of the Christian Right, warning against both simple-minded denunciation and advocacy of it.[163] But his concerns in the "Naked Public Square" were manifold, revolving around the collapse of public virtues in America and the failure of the Protestant "mainline" churches to confront it effectively, and also the rise of "moral majoritarianism" as a kind of populist religiosity. He was critical of American religiosity and its inability to confront the problems of morality and demo-

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[161] St Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 1, 5. Not coincidentally, this was the very last quotation which Neuhaus chose in his very last text he published before death. R. J. Neuhaus, *Afterword…,* p. 193.

[162] R.P. George, *Foreword*, [in:] *The Naked Public Square Reconsidered…*, p. XI.

[163] Neuhaus sided with the evangelicals in their opposition to a devaluation of the sacred in the name of scientism, and secularism, including legal secularism as ideology, while parted ways on science as such. For instance, distancing himself from their teaching on evolution, he was against teaching it as a proof of the materialist origins of reality – that is evolution taught as ideology derived from a scientific fact. See: N. Feldman, *Divided by God: America's Church – State Problem And What We Should Do About It*, New York 2005.

cracy in the late liberal era. He had reservations about the populist ascendancy of the Christian Right, especially the Moral Majority of Jerry Falwell, in the public square, but did not object to linking it to the civil rights struggles of Martin Luther King. Such analogies surprised and offended many. However, as Neuhaus pointed out, they were in the same category as religious American protesters – a religiously motivated response to an injustice in the public sphere. They were dissimilar figures, their analyses differed, and in the civil rights struggle in the fifties and sixties they disagreed for some time, with Falwell acknowledging later his moral wrong. But they were similar in one fundamental sense. Both

> […] disrupt the business of secular America by an appeal to religiously based public values. Both are profoundly patriotic figures. King's dream was of America as an exemplar of racial and social justice, an anticipation of that 'beloved community' promised by God. Current political preachers are alike in proposing a vision of public virtue and that vision is religiously based. The assertion that binds together otherwise different causes is the claim that only a transcendent, a religious vision, can turn society from certain disaster and toward the fulfillment of its destiny. In this connection 'destiny' is but another word for purpose. From whatever point on the political spectrum such an assertion is made, it challenges the conventional wisdom that America is a secular society. In recent decades we have become accustomed to believe that of course America is a secular society. That, in the minds of many, is what is meant by the separation of church and state. But this way of thinking is of relatively recent vintage. Such a religious evacuation of the public square cannot be sustained, either in concept or in practice. When religion in any traditional or recognizable form is excluded from the public square, it does not mean that the public square is in fact naked. This is the other side of the naked public square metaphor. When recognizable religion is excluded, the vacuum will be filled by ersatz religion, by religion bootlegged into public space under other names.[164]

Neuhaus recognized the importance of the Moral Majority resurgence. The crudeness, theological confusions, and social and moral sins of its message did dot obliterate the fact that it had raised the fundamental issue of religion as a barrier against the totalitarian pretensions of the modern liberal state. Previously, classical liberals had valued religion in the public square as an indispensable part of maintaining American freedom. However, not any more. But Neuhaus considered the Moral Majority as a good, even if crude, way of bringing the larger issue of religion into public life, and at the same time raising the issue of freedom in a liberal society. However, the crude Moral Majority public principles needed to be converted into principles accessible to the public at large. He postulated that the

> […] publicly assertive religious forces will have to learn that the remedy for the naked public square is not naked religion in public. They will have to develop a mediating language by which ultimate truths can be related to the penultimate and prepenultimate questions of political and legal content. In our several traditions, there are rich conceptual resources for the development of such mediating language – whether concepts be called natural law, common grace, general revelation, or the order of creation. Such a civil engagement of secular and religious forces could produce a new public philosophy to sustain this American experiment in liberal democracy. The result may not be that we would agree with one another. Indeed there may be more disagreement. But at least we would know what we are di-

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[164] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 78–80.

sagreeing about, namely, different accounts of the transcendental good by which we might order our life together. Contra [some judges] and legions of others, democracy is not served by evading the question of the good. Democracy becomes a political community worthy of moral actors only when we engage the question of the good.[165]

Neuhaus criticized the Christian Right less for theological reasons than for reasons of political prudence and out of a sheer aesthetic dislike of its bluntness and its sometimes repugnant public activities.[166] This amounted to a politicization of a religious cause. But he lauded the Christian Right for its concern over a debased American culture and public morality: "the issue of the proper relation between church and state, which he believe[d] [was] very much out of balance".[167] The Christian Right was correct in rebelling against the monistic pretenses of the liberal state, confining religious people to the ghetto of their private convictions, but was wrong if it wanted to win over a public without persuading others why it was dangerous for freedom and democracy to push religion out of the public square, and why it was beneficial for the secularists to engage in conversation with them. At issue was communication, a need to engage society in a language comprehensible enough to become an effective medium of searching for the common good in a civilized way. When the Religious Right

[…] enter the public arena, New Right leaders [should] not insist that everyone there must past a test of Judeo-Christian moral orthodoxy. They do insist that they will not check their own beliefs in the cloakroom before entering. No longer content to be smugglers, they are in open rebellion against the border patrols that would maintain and even intensify the line between sacred and secular.[168]

Whatever its immediate policies, pointed out Neuhaus, the political and theological dilemmas of the religious New Right stem from the fact that it

[…] wants to enter the political arena making public claims on the basis of private truths. The integrity of politics itself requires that such a proposal be resisted. Public decisions must be made by arguments that are public in character. A public argument is transubjective. It is not derived from sources of revelation or disposition that are essentially private and arbitrary. The perplexity of fundamentalism in public is that its self-understanding is premised upon a view of religion that is emphatically not public in character. Fundamentalism is the religious variant of what Alasdair MacIntyre calls 'modern emotivism'. By emotivism is meant that state of affairs in which every moral statement is simply a statement of private preference. It has no inherently normative or public force.[169]

Such emotivism may have force in the public arena, for instance winning elections from time to time. But this is just politics, civil war carried on by other means

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[165] Idem, *Nihilism without the Abyss: Law, Rights, and Transcendent Good*, as quoted in: S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America…*, p. 469.

[166] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 6.

[167] J. Caiazza, *The American Religion in Decline: Five Views*, "The Political Science Reviewer" 2010, Vol. 39, p. 200.

[168] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 36.

[169] *Ibidem*, p. 36.

The Religious Right mobilizes against secular humanists and the "naked public square", when in fact it is

> […] an indispensable collaborator in that creation. By separating public argument from private belief, by building a wall of strict separationism between faith and reason, such fundamentalist religion ratifies and reinforces the conclusions of militant secularism. The religious new right [should] take a leaf from the manual of an earlier Christian liberalism that, despite differences in religious belief, there is a core consensus on what is moral. This is the much discussed 'moral agenda' on which, presumably, Christians of all stripes, even nonbelievers, can come together. The issues themselves may be penultimate or less, but their resolution requires a publicly discussable sense of more ultimate truths that serve as points of reference in guiding our agreements and disagreements. Such resolution requires a public ethic that we do not now possess.[170]

For Neuhaus, the biblical anthropological vision ultimately provided the surest guarantee of freedom for all, religious and nonreligious, whatever the historical vicissitudes of Christianity. The elimination of religion, a.k.a. Christianity, from the public discourse was thus contrary both to the American identity and the aims of the liberal project of equal rights in freedom. The American experiment guarantees freedom because it is rooted in a transcendent anthropological vision. This vision is still present in America, even if not overtly conceptualized, but it

> […] is not contentless. Both historically and in present sociological fact, it is religiously specific, it refers to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The acknowledgment of this reality is in the most particular interest of the considerable number of Americans who do not subscribe to that tradition in any conscious manner. And that is because it is precisely by the authority of that tradition that the rights of dissent are protected.[171]

Neuhaus acknowledged that the Religious Right rebelled against secularism, subverting this tradition. But the understanding of the language of and reason for the rebellion – as well as who was and who was not an ally – was limited. Many of them did not understand that democratic dissent is also mandated by biblical faith. It seemed to them that if Christian faith was the absolute truth, then all citizens

> […] ought to subscribe to it and public life ought to be ordered according to that truth. This universal mission should be carried out by persuasion, if possible, and (although few would put it so bluntly) by coercion, if necessary. To those who think in this way, talk about democracy and diversity as part of the divine interest seems to undercut the universal mission of the church. This is a perennial problem in Christian thinking. Diversity in belief is inherent in, and not accidental to, the divine purpose. That some do not believe is not necessarily evidence that the entirety of God's purpose is limited to our programs, including our programs of evangelism. The democratic sense of accountability is also a check upon the pretensions of the church. The basic lesson, which Christians must learn again and again, is that the church is not the kingdom of God. The disappointment was understandable. If the church is the same as the kingdom of God, we have no reason to 'seek first the kingdom', for the Church is undoubtedly already here. The grand inquisitors of our day, whether of the left or the right, are as impatient as was Dostoyevsky's with limitations of their authority. Talk about Christian America will continue to frighten many sensible

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170 *Ibidem*, p. 37.
171 *Ibidem*, p. 121.

people until Christians make clear that they welcome and cultivate such limitation of their authority. People will continue to seek in secularity their safety from religious tyranny until Christians believably propose that there is greater safety under a sacred canopy that brings all institutions and belief systems, and most particularly religion, under judgment. The canopy is that to which Judeo-Christian religion points. Religion bears witness to it but our religion is not to be equated with it. On the other hand, the canopy is a canopy, it is not mere 'emptiness' [but] promises and judgments revealed in the biblical story. It is not Hinduism or Taoism. Historically and in present democratic judgement, it is the biblical story. That story is not over yet. We act in a sense of provisionality and historical modesty. Only as the Church, in its own teaching and life, cultivates this sense of provisionality and modesty will religion seem less threatening to those who would now bar it from the public square. Unfortunately, there are those who insist upon what they think of as a full-blooded and aggressive version of the Christian mission.[172]

Neuhaus rejected relativism and acknowledged that Christians must risk ridicule when saying that they do indeed know the most important truth about personal and cosmic salvation, but at the same time this did not mean that

[…] to know the truth is not the same as claiming to have the truth in the sense of mastering or possessing it. We are subject to the truth we possess, and therefore do not possess it in the sense of mastery. Christians, if they are faithful, seek no triumph [of] earthly rule over all things. The cultured despisers of religion need no longer see the sacred canopy as an instrument of closure or coercion, rather it can be seen for what it is: the transcendent truth that both legitimizes and makes necessary the cultivation of democratic diversity. Then it will be seen that secularism's denial or attempted dismantling of the canopy removes what is finally the only moral check upon people who would repress those who do not subscribe to *their* truth.[173]

Religious groups such as the Moral Majority, of course, touched a fundamental nerve of American liberal culture, showing its "pervasive contradiction". This contradiction stemmed from a fissure, Neuhaus pointed out, between democratic ideals and the exclusion after World War II of the crucial values of the American people grounded in religious beliefs. Acknowledging the importance of the Religious Right in setting off the alarm, it itself

[…] was at the heart alarming. Fundamentalist morality, which is derived from beliefs that cannot be submitted to examination by public reason, is essentially a private morality. If enough people who share that morality are mobilized, it can score victories in the public arena. But every such victory is a setback in the search for a public ethic. A serviceable public ethic is not somewhere in our past, just waiting to be found and reinstalled. From the past there may be clues to the reconstruction [of it] for our time. In exploring this possibility we should [have] hope that the [new religious right] may become partners in that reconstruction.[174]

Neuhaus noticed a crisis in mainline Protestant liberalism stemming from its failure to create such a "serviceable public ethic", especially in its idolatrous form of equating "Christian America" with "democratic America". By the end of the 20th century efforts in that direction had been spent. But his concern was mainly the Chri-

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[172] *Ibidem*, p. 122–123.
[173] *Ibidem*, p. 124.
[174] *Ibidem*, p. 37.

stian Right. The American experiment in democracy was not without historically and sociologically specific Judeo-Christian content, but its presentation as a form of political regime constituted a form of idolatry and scared away secularists.[175] Neuhaus rejected this attempt, which had reappeared amongst sections of the Christian Right. Counting himself among the majority of Christians in America, he noted that they "have the gravest reservations about the idea of 'Christian America'. It always makes sense to speak cautiously about America as a Christian society in terms of historical forces, ideas, and demography. But no society is worthy of the name of Christ, except that society which is the church, and then it is worthy only by virtue of being made worthy through the grace of God in Christ".[176]

But the secular left also failed to create a "serviceable public ethic". Their public ethic is inadequate on its own terms. While pushing for the "naked square", it is at the same time perversely "Christianizing" the social order, using such terms as justice, equality and sustainability, but without the Christian anthropology behind them. In the case of the liberal Protestant mainline, their churches' "social gospel" program accepted such a goal – to achieve "Christianizing" of the economic order – as their mission. The trouble with the liberal Protestant mainline churches was, pointed out Neuhaus, that if such a goal "could in fact be achieved. What then is the mission of the church?"[177] In the case of the secular liberal-left, the problem does not stem from a confusion of realms, as is the case with the liberal Protestant churches, but from their anthropological mistake and the social orders proposed by it. Neuhaus showed how the most popular liberal theory of secular "public ethic", based on the theory of justice as fairness by John Rawls, was inadequate. He recognized the novelty of Rawls' "A Theory of Justice" and the recovery of political philosophy. Nevertheless, Rawls

[…] assumes a rather narrow definition of the rational person. Antecedent and abstract choices are qualitatively and substantively different from choices made in particular circumstances. It is by no means obvious that people would choose equality as the chief goal; they might well prefer some other personal or social excellence. Rawls' 'sense of failness' would not necessarily be the controlling moral sentiment – a sense of obligation, of altruism, or of achieving some collective purpose might well have priority. It is argued that, while Rawls' theory is on the surface relentlessly individualistic, it in fact destroys the individual by depriving him of all those personal particularities that are the essence of being an individual. [178]

For Neuhaus, Rawls' theory of justice was riddled with a substantial amount of ignorance and selfishness, a noble intention gone sour. Beyond Rawls' "veil of

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[175] *Ibidem*, p. 121; on the scare which secularists spread indiscriminately against the Christian Right, whether of the Moral Majority or Neuhaus type, see, for instance, D. Linker, *Theocons: Secular America Under Siege*, New York 2006; also G. Wills, *A Country Ruled by Faith*, "The New York Review of Books" 2006, November 16, p. 8–32.

[176] R. J. Neuhaus, an unpublished paper "Democratic Morality: A Possibility", as quoted in S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America…*, p. 470.

[177] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 230–231.

[178] *Ibidem*, p. 257–258.

ignorance" we have non-persons, people without history, tradition, vested interests, having no self-knowledge, no loves or fears, but also no dreams of transcendent purpose or duty. It is impossible to depict living people impartially, without their passions, that is their idiosyncrasies. Such a political and legal construct would be artificial and would sooner or later, if taken seriously, be totalitarian, with life being shaped by the principle of law seeking justice. Rawls thus subsumed life, noted Neuhaus, into an abstract idea of justice, removed from the world in which the legitimacy of law must be renewed. There is no history behind his "veil of ignorance". Like many contemporary liberal theorists, he assumed a universe in which history and human life had been closed, but had finally arrived at an ideal ending point, repeating endlessly the same game beyond the "veil of ignorance". In such a theory, real history does not exist, contingency is banned and no real change can happen. The world is composed of static entities. When allowed, change is simply a cyclical recurrence of the same old scheme, like the same tune of a jammed record. Nothing can be more alien, pointed out Neuhaus, to the Judeo-Christian tradition premised upon

> [...] the concept of real history, real change, happening in an incomplete universe that is still awaiting its promised fulfillment. There is no alternative to history. Only in history can we address the problems of history. [Thus] the contrivance of a historyless idea of justice that miscarries such an idea will not serve [as a basis of 'serviceable public ethic'] because it is impossibly exotic. The legitimacy of law in a democratic society depends upon the popular recognition of the connections between law and what people think life is and ought to be. [There are] limitations to theories of justice that cannot sustain a democratic consensus regarding the legitimacy of law.[179]

The creation of a "serviceable public ethic" stood at the centre of Neuhaus' subsequent public endeavours. Apart from his writings, there were the institutional undertakings: setting up "The Institute of Religion and Public Life", the magazine "First Things" as well as efforts to form an ecumenical basis for such a public ethic in "The Evangelicals and Catholics Together" manifesto. His public ethic rejected the fallacy of the secularist culture, which excluded any indebtedness to religious thought, mainly Christian, even if it inherited its intuitions, habits of mind, heart and aspirations. For such a "serviceable public ethic" to be real, the secular culture has to recognize that, as Michel Novak wrote

> [...] their own claim to universal superiority – the enlightened looming over those still walking in darkness was premature [and that] to be forced to choose between science and religion, or between the ways reason and the ways of faith, is not an adequate human choice. Better it is to take part in a prolonged, intelligent and respectful conversation across those outmoded ways of drawing lines.[180]

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[179] *Ibidem*, p. 257–258. Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* influenced generations of liberal post-1968 thinkers, devising an idea of human dignity as essentially a self-referential concept, with an ideology of liberal human rights as the universal basis of the liberal world order. The fallacy of such a self-referential anthropological perspective has been exposed by many, later in his life, even by Rawls himself. See: J. Kekes, *The Illusions of Egalitarianism...*; P. Manent, *The City of Men*, Ithaca 1998; M. J. Perry, *Toward a Theory of Human Rights: Religion, Law, Courts*, Cambridge 2007, p. 14–32.

[180] M. Novak, *Remembering the Secular Age*, "First Things", June–July 2007, p. 40.

Of course, the problem with Neuhaus's argument was whether this effort was realistic and not stemming from a need to redefine American democracy with a hope of thwarting the new reigning anthropology of the imperial self of the post-1968 liberalism, recognized as the only legitimate public language, excluding any common moral goods, except in the utilitarian, or sensationalist sense. The assumed neutrality or objectivity of such of a liberal discourse is spurious.[181] Neuhaus postulated a recovery of some substantive account of goods that make a good society possible. For that to happen the wishes, hopes and desires of real people have to be taken into account. Their religious convictions cannot be left behind when they participate in the public arena. They constitute the richness of the human species; they cannot be private, even if they are deeply personal. Some doubt whether the Christian Right which Neuhaus criticized differs so much from Neuhaus's in its postulate of reconstituting the social ethic on a Christian basis.[182] They definitely share the same anthropological basis of the social order, and think that without it secular liberalism's theory of justice and rights cannot sustain itself. They differ in their way of conducting the argument, and the aims they want to achieve. Neuhaus wants to use the non-denominational language of natural law and reason to search for common ground. The Christian Right, an overwhelmingly Protestant phenomenon, disregards it.

Spinoza said that transcendence abhors a vacuum, and for Neuhaus there were reasons why the "naked public square" was dangerous. The term for him was an oxymoron; a new ideology would have to take the place of religion in the public square. For Neuhaus it was the "religion" of the state and its bureaucratic-intellectual new elite, a lethal threat to a self-governing society. The very nature of things would demand such an outcome, since

[…] if law and laws are not seen to be coherently related to basic presuppositions about right and wrong, good and evil, they will be condemned as illegitimate. After having excluded traditional religion, then, the legal and political trick is to address questions of right and wrong in a way that is not 'contaminated' by the label religious. The tortured reasoning required by the exclusion of identifiable religion is a puzzle to many, perhaps most, Americans. It may be that they are puzzled because they do not understand the requirements of a pluralistic society. Or that may be puzzled because they are more impressed by the claim that this is a democratic society. In a democratic society the public business is carried on in conversation with the actual values of people who are the society. There is among Americans a deep and widespread uneasiness about the denial of the obvious. The obvious is that, in some significant sense, this is a Christian people.[183]

Neuhaus's aim was to show, in the tradition of Oresten Brownson, Reinhold Niebuhr and Murray, that a modern intellectual can think about religion in the public square in an intelligible language, engaging opponents in a universal, reasoned

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[181] For broader coverage, see J. Coleman, *An American Strategic Theology*, Ramsey NJ 1982, p. 197–198.

[182] For instance, Stanley Hauerwas criticized both Neuhaus and the Religious Right, claiming that they constitute "a call for reconstituting Christian America". S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America…*, p. 473.

[183] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 80–82.

argument accessible to all – not just showing gestures of irritation and using war-
-mongering tactics that are then justified in religious language as being a way of pre-
-empting the argument from the beginning. He knew the dangers of translating faith
into a political agenda. It is characteristic that "First Things" never published any
official editorial on contemporary political affairs. Neuhaus published his comments
in a review in "The Public Square" in each volume, but not as an official stance. His
interlocutors were extremely diverse. He wanted to hear what others had to say, be-
cause he wanted to think his way forward from shared convictions about first things,
not backward from the happenstance of agreement about this or that political issue of
the day. He understood religious freedom and the Christian public role in this way,
repeating that "in the Christian tradition, being true to yourself means being true to
the self that you are called to be".[184] Neuhaus pointed out that the idea of the United
States as a secular society was false and dangerous. It was false despite the Supre-
me Court's interpretation since 1947 of the First Amendment as requiring a strict
separation of the state from society.[185] Neuhaus stressed that the First Amendment
was one unified structure. It did not create two separate rights from the anti-establi-
shment clause and the freedom of religion clause. The First Amendment was put into
the constitution so that the anti-establishment clause could guarantee the freedom
of religion clause. The separation of the church from the state, as the first part of the
First Amendment is usually referred to, was not put into the constitution to protect
the state and the people from religion, but to protect religion and religious people
from the state, and also to prevent the threat of the state machinery being captured by
one of the warring Protestant sects, establishing a state religious monopoly against
other denominations. The intention of the First Amendment was to separate religion
from the state to prevent an official European-type state faith favoured by the fede-
ral government. But society was to be left free to exercise its religious freedom as
a public affair, an exercise in legitimate citizenship.[186] This idea of the United States
as a secular society was also dangerous politically since the values of the American
people were rooted in overwhelmingly Christian religiosity. They might not tolerate
an attempt by the Supreme Court to take from them this fundamental right and power
of deciding how to organize their life together.[187]

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[184] Quoted in R. Ponnuru, *The Gift of Lightheartedness*, "First Things", April 2009, p. 57.

[185] Here the Court used the phrase "the wall of separation", coined by Thomas Jefferson in
a private letter to a Baptist congregation at the end of his life. On the evolving use of the phrase "wall of
separation", see: D. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation between Church and State*,
New York 2000, p. 55–70, 83–106.

[186] Since Neuhaus's argument in 1984, this politically driven interpretation of the First
Amendment as a justification for a "wall of separation" between not only the state and religion, but
also society and religion, has been amply documented. The best study showing how this interpreta-
tion was driven by the anti-Catholic sentiment within the Protestant establishment was provided by
P. Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, Cambridge Mass. 2002.

[187] This danger eventually drove Neuhaus to organize the "The End of Democracy?" sym-
posium in 1996, one of the most controversial ones in American public debates after 1945.

Biblical religion was for Neuhaus the surest safeguard of freedom in a liberal democracy, as the final brake on the omnipotent pretensions of the state. With that barrier gone, the greatest achievement of Western civilization, the limited government rooted in the Christian division into *sacrum* and *profanum* would be gone too. For Neuhaus, the Judeo-Christian religion should be the anthropological foundation for liberal democracy. For him, the post 1947 Supreme Court interpretation of the First Amendment dovetailed with the post-1968 anthropology of the imperial self and was to bring not a separation of the state from religion for the sake of neutrality, but an imposition of a state "religion" in the public square.[188] To do so it was necessary to delegitimize and define religion as a "problem" in the public square, a process which started a long time before with modern sociology, anthropology and psychotherapy as "disenchantment" techniques.[189] A recognition of religion as a threat to public order has been visible in the adjudications of the Supreme Court since 1947, changing the traditional meaning of the First Amendment and defining religion in an ideologically motivated way.[190] Religion, observed Neuhaus

[…] no longer referred to those communal traditions of ultimate beliefs and practices ordinarily called religion. Religion, in the court's meaning, became radically individualized and privatized. Religion became a synonym for conscience; religion is no longer a matter of content but of [sheer] sincerity. It is no longer a matter of communal values but of individual conviction. In short, it is no longer a public reality and therefore cannot interfere with public business.[191]

He opposed an interpretation of the First Amendment which would make freedom of religion a function of freedom of speech and convert it into a mere freedom of conscience, contrary to both the letter of the law and its intention . This was an interpretation in the light of secular, atheistic axioms, according to which the First Amendment was to defend the state and the people against religion, not to defend

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[188] See: T. Dostert, *Richard John Neuhaus: Judeo-Christian Religion as Cultural Foundation for Democracy*, [in:] idem, *Beyond Political Liberalism: Towards a Post-Secular Ethics of Public Life*, Notre Dame IN 2006, p. 103–113.

[189] On this issue, see: A. Bryk, *Konserwatyzm amerykański: od Reagana do Obamy*, [in:] *Ronald Reagan. Nowa odsłona w 100-lecie urodzin*, ed. P. Musierowicz, Kraków 2011, p. 212–214; A. Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the 20th Century*, Princeton 2004.

[190] As late as 1931, in "US v. Macintosh", the Supreme Court asserted without fear of contradiction that Americans "are a Christian people acknowledging with reference the duty of obedience to the will of God also, we are a nation with the duty to survive". 283 US 605, 632– 633. In "Zorach v. Clausen" in 1952, the Court, in the words of Justice Douglas declared "We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being", 343 US 306, 1952, p. 313. Justice Potter Steward in "McGovan v. Maryland" of 1961 stated that the American tradition came from the Declaration of Independence, which avowed "a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence". The Founders wanted to disestablish an official state church, but not to ban religion from public life. Thus "what is relevant [is] the history of the religious traditions of our people, reflected in countless practices of the institutions and officials of our government", 366 US 420, 1961, p. 445–450. This move from religion as a right to religion as a threat, "as religious indoctrination" to the public square, see J .Hitchcock, *The Supreme Court and Religion in American Life…*, p. 73–76.

[191] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 80.

religion and the people from the state – interpretations where freedom of religion was treated not as a separate right, but a subspecies of the free speech clause. He quoted Christopher Hitchens here, an exemplary representative of secular public intellectuals, an avowed atheist battling Christianity as a "pernicious superstition", who reflected the thinking of secular constitutionalists: "No other country has such a terse and comprehensive statement of the case for free expression: considered important enough to rank first, and also to rank with the freedom of religious conscience".[192] Neuhaus replied that

[…] free expression does not rank first, unless he means the free expression of religion. But [Hitchens] cannot mean that, because he then says freedom of expression ranks with the freedom of religious conscience. Which is wrong, since the first freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment is not the freedom of religious conscience but of religious exercise. It is a nuisance that ideological secularists have such difficulty making their peace with the fact that most of the Founders believed that religious freedom is the foundation of all freedoms. Their right to disagree with the Founders is guaranteed, but their persistent misinterpretation of what the Founders believed and did is at least unseemly.[193]

Neuhaus pointed out that the American identity was incomprehensible without a religious dimension inseparable from a tradition of freedom. The struggle for independence in the 18th century, the anti-slavery movement, the progressive movement, the civil rights revolution in the 1950s, even the rise of the religious right in the 1970s, could not separate this religious dimension from the American freedom experience of a self-governing people. America has been such a success not despite this religious dimension, but because of it, a case drastically different from the European post-1789 tradition of liberalism, which fascinates larger and larger circles of American cognoscenti in academia and the media.[194] That is why, wrote Neuhaus

[…] the notion that [America] is a secular society is relatively new. While the society is incorrigibly religious, the state is secular. But such a disjunction between society and state is a formula for governmental delegitimation. In a democratic society, state and society must draw from the same moral well. In addition, because transcendence abhors a vacuum, the state that styles itself as secular will almost certainly succumb to secularism. Because government cannot help but make moral judgments of an ultimate nature, it must, if it has in principle excluded identifiable religion, make those judgments by 'secular' reasoning that is given the force of religion. This process is already advanced in the spheres of law and public education [and is called] secular humanism [which is], in this case simply the term unhappily chosen for *ersatz* religion. More than that, the notion of the secular state can become the prelude to totalitarianism. That is, once religion is reduced to nothing more than privatized conscience, the public square has only two actors in it – the state and the individual. Religion as a mediating structure – a community that generates and transmits moral values – is no longer available as a countervailing force to the ambitions of the state. The chief attack is not upon individual religious belief. Individual religious belief can be dismissed scornfully as superstition, for it finally poses little threat to the power of the state. No, the chief attack is upon the *institutions* that bear and promulgate

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[192] Idem, *While We're At It…*, p. 82.
[193] *Ibidem*.
[194] On this difference between the American and the European traditions concerning religion see G. Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenment*, New York 2005, p. 147–226.

belief in a transcendent reality by which the state can be called to judgment. Such institutions threaten the totalitarian proposition that everything is to be within the state, nothing is to be outside the state.[195]

Using the Augustinian distinction, Neuhaus showed that Nazi Germany and Marxism-Leninism and its communist embodiments were not the only threats to freedom. The fragility of liberal democracy could manifest itself the moment liberalism turned itself into a monistic ideology of a benevolent, omnipotent state. The chief threat came from a collapse of the idea of freedom and the social arrangements necessary to sustain liberal democracy. Institutional, public – not privatized – religion was one of its preconditions. Crucial for a free democratic liberal order was thus a public square in which there are

[…] many actors. The state is one actor among others. Indispensable to this arrangement are the institutional actors, such as the institutions of religion that make claims of ultimate or transcendent meaning. The several actors in the public square – government, corporations, education, communications, religion – are to challenge, check, and compete with one another. They also cooperate with one other. [Yet] in a democracy the role of cooperation is not to be deemed morally superior to the roles of checking and competing. Giving an unqualified priority to the virtue of cooperation, as some Christians do, is the formula for the death of democracy. There is an inherent and necessary relationship between democracy and pluralism. It means that there are contenders striving with one another to define what the play is about–what are the rules and what the goal. The democratic soul is steeled to resist the allure of a 'cooperation' that would bring that contention to a premature close. Indeed within the bond of civility, the democratic soul exults in that contention. He exalts not because contention is a good in itself but because it is a necessary provisional good short of the coming of the kingdom of God.[196]

Neuhaus takes this idea of the nature of democracy in which citizens are engaged in a contest from Reinhold Niebuhr and Murray. This is an act of defiance against the mood of the day. Their dismissal as old hat is a

[…] mindless dismissal [which] results in part from a desire to espouse the latest thing. It is a bias of the superficially educated that books written thirty years ago, not to say three hundred years ago, are passé. In Christian circles this dismissal takes the curious twist of being conducted in the name of the most current version of 'true Christianity' [but] epochs are not demarcated by publishers' seasons. The test of our epoch is to sustain the democratic 'proposition' in the face of the human yearning for monism. Monism is another word for totalitarianism.[197]

Neuhaus asserted the fundamental political contribution of Christianity to human freedom: a dualism of powers – an unbridgeable division between *sacrum* and *profanum* – a precondition of true freedom, the aims of which were not political. He repeated that "the first thing to know about politics is that politics is not the first thing". Christianity's gift to political thought was a rejection of the false anthropology that politics was the end of life, capable of overcoming human alienation. Christianity destroyed once and for all the monistic concept of sovereignty from which the ultimate commands came, never to be contested for want of a proper justification. Such commands were to define without any outside verification the aims of a socie-

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[195] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 82.

[196] *Ibidem*, p. 84.

[197] *Ibidem*, p. 84–85.

ty, its laws, values, its religion, the very essence of human existence. The modern concept of sovereignty in the 17th c. rejected this Christian dualism and pushed to privatize Christianity, rejecting Christianity as a community of faithful organized by the Church, the bearer and transmitter of *anamnesis,* the true interpreter of the human predicament. But Neuhaus was also resisting the monistic pretensions of post-1968 liberalism, which tried to monopolize the meaning of this modern sovereignty.[198] Judeo-Christian ontology and anthropology was for him the surest guarantee of human freedom and its perpetuation in culture was a sine qua non condition of liberal democracy being both liberal and democratic.[199]

A precondition of this was the presence of religion in the public square, treated not as a spiritual tool of personal self-contentment but as a guardian of the autonomy of human existence against the monistic pretensions of the state. Neuhaus battled the "liberal" version of Christianity, seeing it as a servant of the aims set by the monistic liberal state, limited to the role of its spiritual department and defining orthodoxy according to the aims set by such a state – as in ancient Rome, working towards augmenting the glory of the empire and not carrying out an assessment of its actions from outside. The public presence of religion meant the freedom of autonomous institutions such as churches, families, and associations from the intrusion of the omnipotent sovereign state.[200] The monistic pretensions of contemporary liberalism do not limit themselves to the national context. It tries to create one universalistic ideology – for instance, human rights ideologically defined. For Neuhaus, the post-1968 liberalism had a tendency to turn to such a new ideology, since "the prelude to this totalitarian monism is the notion that society can be ordered according to secular technological reasons without reference to religious grounded meaning".[201] But liberal monism could not sustain the meaning which it wanted to create. An

> […] effort to establish and maintain the naked public square would be the source of the collapse. Totalitarian monism would be the consequence of such a collapse. Americans may, with a little help from their adversaries, find their own distinctive way to terminate the democratic experiment to which they gave birth. The 'naked public square' is an 'impossible' project. That does not deter people from attempting it. In the minds of some secularists the 'naked public square' is a desirable goal. They subscribe to the dogma of the secular Enlightenment that, as people become more enlightened (educated), religion will wither away; or, if it does not wither away, it can be safety sealed off from public consideration, reduced to a private eccentricity. Our argument is that the 'naked public square' is not desirable, even if it was possible. It is not desirable in the view of believers because they are inescapably entangled in the belief

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[198] It is beyond the scope of this article to answer the question of whether there is any other form of liberalism possible, in other words whether liberalism of its own nature leads towards a monistic understanding of sovereignty and an elimination of any competitor, with its new "religion" of human rights defined essentially on the basis of the anthropology of an imperial self, the aims of which are to be set by the strongest in the political or economic market. On that fascinating issue, see P. Manent, *The City of Man…*, p. 156–182.

[199] See: T. Dostert, *Beyond Political Liberalism…*, p. 103–113.

[200] This was the idea which Neuhaus, together with Peter Berger, explored in their book *To Empower the People…*

[201] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 85.

that the moral truths of religion have a universal and public validity. The Ten Commandments, to take an obvious example, have a normative status. They are not, as it has been said, Ten Suggestions or Ten Significant Moral Insights to be more or less appreciated according to one's subjective disposition. In addition to not being desirable the 'naked public square' is not possible. It is an illusion, for the public square cannot and does not remain naked. When particular religious values and the institutions that bear them are excluded, the inescapable need to make public moral judgments will result in an elite construction of a normative morality from sources and principles not democratically recognized by the society. The truly naked public square is at best a transitional phenomenon. It is a vacuum begging to be filled.[202]

   The new sovereign monistic state is prone to being operated by the New Class of cognoscenti, who are the most powerful group in the public square, imposing their vision of political order on (against) the self-governing people. This was one of Neuhaus's obsessions: he was looking at politics as a faulty, necessary tool in this corrupted world of plural people organizing themselves as a free community. People who are formed from bottom up by institutions and then impart such values for the sake of the public order and engage in a moral debate, answering questions about a civilized society. If such institutions transmitting values were excluded, the vacuum

   […] will be filled by the agent left in control of the public square, the state. In this manner, a perverse notion of the disestablishment of religion leads to the establishment of the state as church religion is viewed [here by some] as a repressive imposition upon the public square. They would cast out the devil of particularist religion and thus put the public square in proper secular order. Having cast out the one devil, they unavoidably invite the entrance of seven devils worse than the first. The totalitarian alternative edges in from the wings, waiting impatiently for the stage to be cleared of competing actors. Most important is that the stage be cleared of those religious actors that presume to assert absolute values and thus pose such a troublesome check upon the pretensions of the state. The state is not waiting with a set of absolute values of its own or with a ready – made religion. Far from waiting with a package of absolutes, in a society where the remnants of procedural democracy survive, the state may be absolutely committed only to the relativization of all values. In that instance, however, the relativity of all things becomes the absolute. Without the counterclaims of "meaning-bestowing" institutions of religion, there is not an absence of religion but, rather, the triumph of the religion of relativity. It is a religion that must

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[202] *Ibidem*, p. 85–86. Neuhaus here follows Murray on the dangers of ideological monism, a code word for totalitarianism. Murray wrote that the "cardinal assertion is a thorough-going monism, political, social, juridical, religious: there is only one Sovereign, one society, one law, one faith. And the cardinal denial of Christian dualism of powers, societies, and laws – spiritual and temporal, divine and human. Upon this denial follow the absorption of the church in the community, the absorption of the community in the state, the absorption of the state in the party, and the assertion that the party-state is the supreme spiritual and moral, as well as political authority and reality. It has its own absolutely autonomous ideological substance and its own absolutely independent purpose: it is the ultimate bearer of human destiny. Outside of this One Sovereign there is nothing. Or rather, what presumes to stand outside is 'the eternity'. And if this country is to be overthrown from within or from without, I would suggest that it will not be overthrown [Murray wrote in 1960 – AB] by Communism. It will be overthrown because it will have made an impossible experiment. It will have undertaken to establish a technological order of most marvelous intricacy, which will have been constructed and will operate without relations to true political ends and this technological order will hang, as it were, suspended over a moral confusion; and this moral confusion will itself be suspended over a spiritual vacuum. This would be the real danger resulting from a type of fallacious, fictitious, fragile unity that could be created among us". Neuhaus did not give the source of these quotations but they are obviously from Murray's magnum opus *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* [1960].

in principle deny that it is religious. It is a religion that dare not speak its name. In its triumph there is no contender that can, in Peter Berger's phrase, 'relativize the relativizers.'[203]

Neuhaus was depicting here the value of "liberal tolerance", the "religion" of the post-1968 era, as opposed to true tolerance. He pointed out that tolerance was not a value in itself; it was just a utilitarian tool, making it possible for differently thinking people to co-exist relatively peacefully. Tolerance was more the province of prudent politics than morality.

For Neuhaus, the "naked public square" in principle posed no danger, provided that a society could go along without a normative ethic. However, its relativist elite guarding "liberal tolerance" – as observed by Alisdair MacIntyre and quoted by Neuhaus – who have been governing liberal societies for quite some time, should properly be called "barbarians". They are the New Elite. The fact that

[…] the barbarians are composed of the most sophisticated and educated elites of our society makes them no less barbarian. The barbarians are those who in principle refuse to recognize a normative ethic or the reality of public virtue. The barbarians are the party of emancipation from the truths civilized people consider self-evident. The founding fathers of the American experiment declared certain truths to be self-evident and moved on from that premise. It is a measure of our decline into what may be the new dark ages that today we are compelled to produce evidence for the self-evident. Not that it does much good to produce such evidence, however, for such evidences are ruled to be inadmissible since, again in principle, it is asserted that every moral judgment is simply an instance of emotivism, a statement of subjective preference that cannot be imposed upon others. [This is] an accurate description of the logic of contemporary philosophical, moral, and legal reasoning. Fortunately, the real world is not terribly logical. The vitalities of democracy protest that dour logic. That resentment against the logic of the 'naked public square' is a source of hope that resentment is premised upon an alternative vision that calls for a new articulation. When it finds its voice, it will likely sound very much like the voice of Christian America. That voice will not be heard and thus will not prevail in the public square, however, unless it is a voice that aims to reassure those who dissent from that vision.[204]

For Neuhaus conceptually there is no alternative to a de facto state "religion", i.e. ideology, once transcendental religion has been removed from the public square. This is so because it

[…] is in the nature of the public square not to remain naked, and a certain type of "new" religion has to be provided for the sake of the legitimacy of the system, the idea understood well by Rousseau. In America, observed Neuhaus, the proponents of the 'naked public square' deny that they want exactly that. Whether they call themselves technocratic liberals, secular pragmatists, libertarians or socialists they pretend to talk about 'rational control' of political, economic and cultural forces. But whatever the rationale or intention Neuhaus thinks the presupposition is the 'naked public square', which is tantamount to an exclusion of religious and moral belief from public discussion. And whatever the intention, because the 'naked public square ' cannot remain naked, the direction is towards the state as church, toward totalitarianism. The nub of the dispute is not [the choice] between private conscience and the public conscience expressed by the state. The private conscience is not private in the sense of being deracinated, torn from its roots. It is not individualistic. Private conscience too is communal; it is shaped by the myriad communities from which we learn to 'put the world together' in

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[203] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 86–87.
[204] *Ibidem*, p. 87.

an order that is responsive to our understanding of right and wrong. As for 'the public conscience', it is a categorical fallacy. It harks back to Rousseau's mythology of a 'general will' of which the state is the expression. The Public does not have conscience. 'The People' does not have conscience. Only persons and persons-in-community have consciences. There is a growing awareness of the limits of the political, a recognition that most of the things that matter most are attended to in communities that are not government and should not be governmentalized. We are no longer content to let 'public' be synonymous with 'government'. Jefferson, Jackson, Lippmann, Dewey, Schlesinger, and others strove to articulate democracy as a creedal cause. But finally it is a faith in which freedom is the end as well as the means. It is a faith devoid of transcendent purpose that can speak to the question of what freedom is for. This is, of necessity, a religious question. The truly 'positive' state that presumes to address this question becomes the state – as-church. The political freedom of liberal democracy is essentially a 'negative' freedom, freedom from. If we are not to succumb to totalitarianism, the positive meaning of freedom must be addressed in a manner, and through institutions, beyond the competence of what is ordinarily meant by politics or the government. The public square is the stage of many actors, not all of whom are following the same script. It is very confusing. It is democratic.[205]

Neuhaus pointed out that this general assumption of a necessity of a naked public square stemmed from a certain feeling of "guilt" on the part of Christian churches in America, mainly liberal Protestant ones. Historically, these churches had articulated a positive side of the American freedom crusade to promote the "Righteous Empire": an attempt to create "a complete Christian commonwealth" combined with the rhetoric of making the "world safe for democracy" according to mainline Protestant churches' understanding of such terms in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.[206]

This was a political project of progressive Christianity, a process which was to be a response to a crisis of capitalism but which instead caused a crisis of Protestantism and its split into the fundamentalist and the "Social Gospel" wings. The churches had competitors here: the rise of psychotherapy and then the post-1968 anthropology of the imperial self and the expansion of welfare – which also acted as a provider of meaning through being an element of the never-ending realization of the progress of humanity. In response, the mainline Protestant churches gradually abandoned orthodoxy and merged their aims with the progressive aims of the liberal state, treating "religious" public presence as a support for socially "right causes" defined by the state and the elites operating it.

Neuhaus does not describe in detail in "The Naked Public Square" the abandonment by mainline American Protestantism of its role of engaging the democratic, pluralistic public, a development he subjected to theological, moral and political scrutiny years later. But he predicted that the retreat from a reasoned religious public argument by the mainline Protestant denominations meant giving away this argument to the elite of the liberal state, which would merge such an argument within its progressive aims.

That is why there was a "sense" of guilt coming from the jingoistic part of the liberal Protestant establishment combined with an internal crisis brought on by being

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[205] *Ibidem*, p. 89, 92–93.
[206] On this religious-political alliance see R. M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness*…

in a culture encompassing anti-Christian modern anthropology exemplified by "competitors" for the human soul, e.g. psychotherapy. This meant that

> […] those who retired the idea [of Christian American Empire] tended to share the liberal assumption that the task of moral definition could and should be taken over by 'the public conscience' expressed through the state. In the frequently uncritical affirmation of 'the secular city' [the modern liberal state – AB], it was thought a triumph that the churches could step back from what had been a transitional role in the public square.[207]

Neuhaus advocated negative freedom against the monistic pretensions of the liberal discourse, aware that this could also lead to nihilism, an escape to private quarters or libertarian self-absorption. Negative freedom could preserve the autonomy of institutions, churches, families and associations from the monistic pretensions of the liberal state, but by itself it could tell us nothing positive about the nature of this freedom. Neuhaus's was the Aristotelian and Christian concept of truth. Positive freedom could not come from the monistic state. It was to come, thought Neuhaus, from public argument by morally concerned citizens for whom religiously grounded arguments were important for liberal democracy. That is why, as he wrote,

> negative freedom is dangerous to ourselves and others if it is negative freedom alone. As Murray argued, it is not only dangerous but it is 'impossible'. It is most *dangerous* because it is impossible. That is, its very attempt invites the termination of the democratic freedom in the name of which the attempt is made. The question is not *whether* the questions of positive freedom will be addressed. The question is by *whom* – by what reasonings, what traditions, what institutions, what authorities – they will be addressed. If they are to be addressed democratically in a way that gives reasonable assurance of a democratic future, we must work toward an understanding of the public square that is both more comprehensive and more complex. Along the way to such an understanding, we must listen with critical sympathy to those who are speaking the very new-language of Christian America.[208]

The "Naked Public Square" recognized and critically assessed rampant secularism, a new phenomenon in America, the consequences of which were not yet properly defined. The secular "creed" was diffused in America, but it was becoming dominant and focused on pushing religion out of the public square. The consequences of this situation were not recognized properly, thought Neuhaus. He did not use the phrase "secular humanism", but he was, nevertheless, following in the footsteps of evangelical Protestant critics of it, such as Tim Le Haye or Francis Schaeffer,

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[207] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*..., p. 93. This was already sensed by Murray, who epitomized the Catholic ascendancy in America. Catholics were discriminated but came of age socially and culturally in the 1950s. For Murray, the Protestant mainline churches were incapable of stepping outside their role as a spiritual department of the liberal state. They abdicated their role and their orthodoxy. In turn, the Protestant fundamentalist churches were isolated, anti-intellectual and incapable of engaging in the public square in a rational discourse. Murray combined Catholicism with the American tradition, showing the natural law basis of Catholicism and the Declaration of Independence, and then offering a reasoned Catholic argument. It was a modern, reasoned argument for religion's engagement in the public square and a delegitimization of the totalitarian pretensions of liberal monism, defined as contrary to the very sources of American identity.

[208] *Ibidem*, p. 93.

the latter being the author of the term itself. All of them agreed on the dangers of pushing religion into the private sphere, showing the culture forming and mediative role that religion played. Neuhaus also observed a dissolution of the mainline Protestant Churches and their post-1968 liberation from any orthodoxy. Instead of being watchful observers and critics of liberal society, these churches radicalized the social gospel "creed", and identified with the goals of the post-1968 political liberalism, becoming subservient to the increasingly secularized culture. This related not only to such social concerns as the poor, blacks or peace and war issues, which could be reconciled with the traditional Christian or Jewish teachings, but also more alienating issues connected with the consequences of the sexual revolution, such as sexual ethics, abortion, divorce, and homosexuality. The main Protestant churches began here to reflect the liberal post-1968 sensibilities at the cost of a dilution of Christian ethics and morality, beginning to define morality according to the utilitarian ethics of the allegedly neutral state and mass culture.

Neuhaus showed that the pernicious effects of the secularist attempts to exclude religion from the public sphere threatened democratic society by depriving it of public virtue, which might cause extremist responses, which the Christian Right sometimes exhibited out of a feeling of being deprived of citizenship and a consequent helplessness. Such an exclusion was also against the constitutional structure. For the Founding Fathers' religion, a.k.a. mainline Protestantism in all its varieties, underlay the "bare-bones constitutional polity" based on rampant commercial individualism and self-interest – it would make this self-interest "well understood", in the words of James Madison, harnessing it to more noble impulses.[209] The decline of Protestantism as a religious and cultural force shaping American public morals was connected with many negative social consequences, which reached "a frenzied apex" in the 60s and the 70s: rampant social decay and a gradual de-civilization.[210] Neuhaus assumed that it was Catholicism which was going to resurrect this religious public moral discourse, because he thought that teaching natural law was congruent with the American founding principles of the Declaration of Independence. It could stimulate a reasoned public debate via natural law without employing a language directly tied to religious imagery. Catholics, much more than Protestants, could engage secular humanism in a language which was religious and rational at the same time. Such a stance presupposed an anthropology which the post-1968 secularism rejected with its solipsistic anthropology of the imperial self.[211]

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[209] *Ibidem*, p. 140–141; this thesis is explicated best in M. Diamond, *Ethics and Politics: The American Way.*

[210] R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 33.

[211] Later in life, Neuhaus wanted to find a different language from that of natural law, associated inescapably with theology: "I realize that many people are convinced that the concept of natural law has a specifically 'Catholic' brand. This is a real difficulty. The very sound of the word "law" elicits today an allergic reaction. Law seems to be something arbitrary, imposed from the top. I am not personally a rigorist as far as an argument from a natural law position, because of the limited persuasive possibilities of the very word 'natural law'. Although I do not know what better word could be substituted for

He argued for a moral gravity in the personal sphere as well as in the public square against secularism hiding behind many veils, of which one of the most important was human rights culture – as an ideology insisting that Christians must not only respect other religions, but must accept their views as a precondition of legitimate public presence. He noted futile efforts to create a public civil ethics by means of law in the service of secularist ideology, pointing out that

[…] it is culture that has the mediate role between the state and the individual, and it is therefore culture on which Americans should rely for the emplacement of religious and civic values in the fabric of American law. Reliance on law can too explicitly define matters in a theoretical manner rather than in a manner based on the history and character of the American people.[212]

But a postulate to bring religion and thus culture to bear on public morality was not an easy matter. A revival of Protestant ethics was for him a plausible approach but he was critical of the overt politicisation of the Christian Right. Neuhaus advocated a broad alliance of traditional Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish influence and a serious multi-faith dialogue to engage citizens in a serious discourse about the remedies of the growing malaise.[213] He considered that the need for a public ethic was self-evident and that American culture had been formed in large – though unacknowledged – part by Christians. But, as one observer remarked, judging with hindsight, Neuhaus's

[…] analysis of the dire effects of American culture without a religious basis has become increasingly evident, but [it looks] that the serious debate about the need for a public ethic that he looked forward to has not taken place. Instead of a movement to restore public virtue have come trends that have obviously obviated the felt need for an extended and serious debate about the relationship between religion and a public philosophy.[214]

Neuhaus's hope has not materialized. If there is a debate about this need for a religious revival and public philosophy that would link the individual and public

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it. Maybe one could stress more the fact that a human being participates in God's mind? I think, that in the future, we could find an argumentation in the light of which it will be obvious that our interlocutor derives his life choices from the basis of natural law, even if he does not use that concept. In a dialogical way we can come to a conclusion that there is something as the moral truth. We cannot easily reject a suspicion inherent in modernity. In too many false hopes people believed in history. There are some people convinced that the entire history of humanity depends on wagging a flag of hope in the face of a fear of death. Fear is a powerful force, it contributes to generating of different narratives which divert our attention from our greatest enemy – death, a destroyer of sense and of everything we know. But it is not only fear which governs our reality. What with a flag of victory, the victory of love over death shown by Christ? This is exactly the Christian wager, the Christian risk. Can one prove that the Christians are not wrong? No. Yet despite that can we be sure, that Christ rose from the death and defeated death? Yes". R. J. Neuhaus, *Katolicy nie potrafią udowodnić swych racji…*, p. 12.

[212] Idem, *The Naked Public Square…*, p. 249; J. Caiazza, *The American Religion in Decline…*, p. 200–201.

[213] For this reason in 1990 Neuhaus started the journal "First Things" with a wide group of intellectuals from all denominations on its editorial board, with different opinions on a wide range of issues.

[214] J. Caiazza, *The American Religion in Decline…*, p. 201–202.

order it is found only within a narrow circle of academia. It is no longer part of the mass culture. A pernicious effect of the secularization of the public square has been the gradual, dangerous substitution of political for religious categories of public morality. As a consequence

[…] belonging to a religious body that accepts the traditional or biblical standards of morality has become a political act. Believers in traditional religious morality are termed 'conservative' or right – wing by the secular culture; correspondingly eschewing organized religion and accepting the freedom now protected by expanded legal standards of behavior, such as elimination of sodomy laws, identifies one as politically 'liberal' or progressive. The conflict between the conservative and liberal belief systems continues to dominate mainline religious organizations. Neuhaus is the gloomy prophet perceiving the dissolution of church from state from the point of view of traditional Christianity, but he seems to have been the most accurate in predicting its effects. Because of its exclusion from the public square, traditional religious activity has been moving inward rather than attempting to influence the culture in general, as if recognizing that religion has been so thoroughly excluded from the public square that American culture can no longer be directly influenced by the doctrines of traditional religious bodies. Within the traditional and orthodox religious groups there has been a sharpening of appreciation of their traditional discipline, doctrine and practice as if the effort at culture forming is wasted so that at this point in American history it is better to cultivate one's own religious garden. The ongoing process of exclusion of religion from the public square has helped foment a cultural and political divide in America.[215]

Neuhaus took it for granted that being a good religious person was tantamount to being a good American. But today this connection is questioned: being a religious person and trying to influence the public morality is considered dangerous – a serious (display of) faith in public would not be seen as a sign of a "good American" by large and influential segments of American culture and politics. Neuhaus's was a diagnosis and a call to reclaim the American public square from the usurpers who appropriated for themselves a prerogative to define the truth and the (liberal) language and institutions of democracy, while delegitimizing religious people as citizens and imposing on them their secular "faith", making them second class citizens and allowing them to participate in the public discussions not as full persons, but as citizens by concession of the liberal state and its new elites. The Roman idea of an omnipotent sovereign that tolerated religion as long as it was congruent with the imperial aims and strengthened them was back, threatening democracy. With "The Naked Public Square", Neuhaus catapulted himself into the very centre of the public discussion, becoming one of the major public intellectuals, demanding arguments from opponents, not slurs or derisions. It was at the same time a personal beginning of Neuhaus's odyssey into the Catholic Church. The Church became for him the centre of a reasoned, moral presence in the public square in conditions of liberalism's transformation from a pluralistic doctrine of social organization into a monistic ideology of human existence. The Church became thus a guardian against the totalitarian pretensions of the secular mind dismantling the boundary between *sacrum* and *profanum,* which could lead to a situation where human freedom would simply turn into a mere concession from the state. Neuhaus warned that this secular liberal search for Utopia was leading to

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[215] *Ibidem*, p. 201–205.

a dissolution of all human ties and institutions – in fact all culture (so a rationally organized state could lead us to such a situation).

He exposed the fallacy of the secular mind – the mantra of which is always the same, as is its Gnostic, totalitarian hubris – which preaches that after a dissolution ("liberation" from such ties) people would finally have real obligations. But the hardest obligation and the most challenging adventure was to get there and that is why the self-proclaimed leaders were social engineers, leading allegedly confused people there. This was surely a recipe for slavery. Neuhaus helped to jump start a debate which has been going on for decades and which has drawn even liberals into its vortex, smug in their understanding of the neutral public square. It was a criticism of the state effort, through legislature, courts and the media, to enforce a secular, allegedly "neutral" public square. "The Naked Public Square" was a transforming book in the sense that it put religion as a cultural, social and political issue back into the mainstream discussion in an increasingly smug liberal civilization. Religion was suddenly recognized not as a margin of human existence within a liberal civilization, but a fundamental fact of life which had to be taken into account in any discussion of the right political order. The liberal civilization had to confront its own contradictions and the metaphysical emptiness of its secular promise, which caused bitter denials. This process was soon to be called "the culture wars", but it was in fact a war over culture as such. Neuhaus's book constituted a reflection on a much deeper conviction that

his era, our era, was unprecedented, puzzling, and fraught with possibility and peril. The combination of public secularism countered by the emerging 'religious new right' signaled, he thought, a new and paradoxical chapter in the providencial story of the world. More than a theoretical argument. The *Naked Public Square* was Neuhaus's attempt to interpret a distinctive episode in the saga of God's loving struggle with a wayward humanity. The book represents an earnest, deeply learned, sometimes meandering meditation on the meandering of modern secularism. How on earth, Neuhaus wondered, had the nation come to its current embrace of public secularism?[216]

Neuhaus was perplexed because neither American tradition nor the Constitution dictated any such position. But he thought that although the elites embraced liberal secularism as a salvationist orthodoxy and psychotherapy as its gospel, with the imperial self as a new sacrament individually dispensed (an outcome of the fundamental changes of culture in the post-1968 world), the American people did not. They resisted the liberal secularist appeal, being devout as they have always been, even if in a crazy, confused and unorthodox way.

Neuhaus had no doubts that modernity and public secularism as the ideology of the post-1968 liberalism was self-contradictory and totalitarian. This public secularism constitutes the end station of the fight of Western rationalists for a perfect social and political order, emerging after a long struggle with prejudice and superstition. Such a rationalism used science to empirically create a new world against the

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[216] S. D. Smith, *On the Square*, "First Things", April 2009, p. 84.

repressive authority of the Christian churches, mainly the Roman Catholic Church. It was to express pure human intelligence, which put itself in opposition not only to immediate political reality. Culture and religion were also seen as reservoirs of threats to be cleared by rational thinking. Reason considered itself to transcend culture, religion and social mores, becoming a bridge to perfect humanity, capable – so secular rationalism claimed – of achieving unity and the end of alienation. It wanted to be seen as a demiurge of history, coming from an eternal vantage point which the secular rationalists themselves created.[217] The postmodern attack on the Enlightenment rationalism is part of that Gnostic enterprise as well. The great postmodernist despair of not being able to tolerate any strong value judgments, including ones made on the basis of reason alone, stemmed from an awareness that "the same standards of truth and rationality" no longer existed – the "Great Disenchantment". But postmodernism created its own strong value judgment of not tolerating any (values) and making sure that no one would dare to act on such values, for fear of again causing the calamities visible in 20th century European history. But it was also a totalitarian desire to keep a watchful eye on a populace having a proclivity to slip into such an error.[218] Neuhaus's is thus a consistent argument which might be understood as a critique of liberalism in all its versions, as a political tool of secular rationalism – a quasi "religion" for humanity.[219] Christianity is not treated here as one among many enemies of secular liberal monism, but the main enemy, the only competitor capable of facing the whole and destroying liberalism's false anthropological pretensions. This is inevitable and an "either-or" situation, since Christianity cannot tolerate a unified sovereignty defining not only utilitarian political aims, but also the aim of human existence.[220] Allegedly irrational Christianity is thus positioned as the enemy by the secular rational monistic ideology (with liberalism as its carrier), despite the fact that Christianity does not consider such a dichotomy as contradictory, but considers science to be an instrument of theological argument, although not treated as an idolatrous god.[221] Secular reason having defined its pretensions in totalitarian terms cannot leave Christianity alone. The latter's message has to be treated as superseded by secular reason – including in its postmodernist form – and thus tolerated on condition that it reduces itself, like all

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[217] This is "Baron Munchausen's" contradiction of the secularist project. If it is materialistic, as it assumes, and if rationality itself is a product of evolutionary forces with a chemical mechanism, this reason is just a utilitarian way of adjusting to reality. It cannot make any ultimate judgments beyond that point since it immediately transcends the limits of its legitimate claim, trying to put itself at the same time inside matter and outside matter. On the fallacy of pitting theology against science in discussions of reality, see a fascinating study by L. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*, Chicago 2003. Also P. Haffner, *Creation and Scientific Creativity: A Study in the Thought of S. L. Jaki*, Fort Royal Va 1991, p. 48, 71–72.

[218] Neuhaus deals with this problem in his devastating critique of postmodernism. See R. J. Neuhaus, *An Age of Irony* in his *American Babylon: Note of a Christian Exile*, New York 2009, p. 119–162.

[219] See: A. McIntyre, *After Virtue…*, for whom liberalism is waging war on everything, not accepting its defining first principles, even if waged by non-military means.

[220] D. B. Hart, *Christ or Nothing*, "First Things", October 2003, p. 47–57. The gist of it is captured by one sentence "If we turn from Christ today, we turn only towards the god of absolute will, and embrace him under either his most monstrous or his most vapid aspect".

[221] S. L. Jaki, *Angels, Apes and Men*, La Salle Il. 1983.

religions, to spiritual privacy, to just a hobby. But other religions are treated leniently by such secular reason, because they are considered – and they consider themselves – as part of culture, not a challenger in the public square. This is a stance that is congruent with the phony multiculturalist doctrine, since it is tolerated in an Orwellian way, as long as it does not question the mastery of the secular rationalistic paradigm. It is tolerated as a spiritual department of a secular liberal monistic rationality, as an Indian reservation to visit to buy some artefacts – to demonstrate interest in diversity and tolerance. Religions – and Christianity is the main culprit here – may thus be respected as long as they fit into the pluralist constitutionality of the new world order organized by secular reason. But the moment any religion tries to position itself as a judge of this world it is branded as fundamentalist and considered to be an enemy.

However, such a situation cannot be accepted by religious people and is dangerous. The modern secularists' search for a public moral order grounded solely in neutral categories of cold, intellectually concocted schemes of rationality must be insufficient since it has not been successful. This search has not created lasting normative commitments, truths or moral dispositions which might convincingly be regarded as ultimate and authoritative, accepted by all as binding because of the universal verity of such truths. Such truths should be felt not only at the intellectual level, but above all at the existential level of private and public morality. Neuhaus thought that religiously grounded argument was necessary for the sustenance of such universalistic claims and that pushing out religious argument from the public debate was morally untenable and a threat to the perpetuation of public order. Historically, religion had been the principal well of normative command, and pushing it out of that role would not mean that the public square would remain empty of new quasi "religions", self-delusion or tactics to hide the true motives of liberals. Some new orthodoxy, other creed or ideology would move in to fill the space and be imposed on public opinion. This new orthodoxy, Neuhaus knew, was to be likely, as one critic observed,

[…] far less benign than traditional American religion was. It threatens to be totalitarian. The new orthodoxy might be a distinctly American form of Marxism. It might be an oppressive, state imposed individualism, or, conversely, a sectarian, authoritarian religion. Neuhaus suggested that the rabbi who, on hearing talk of 'Christian America' saw an image of barbed wire was not being merely paranoid. All such outcomes were to be fiercely resisted: 'The 'victory' either of the forces of secularism or of the forces promoting an uncomplicated view of Christian America would be disastrous.[222]

For Neuhaus, history was full of hope and there were other possibilities. Politics did not have to operate in the "naked public square" according to the dictates of this new ideology, and become totalitarian and nihilistic. It could be directed by a public philosophy that, although

[…] religiously grounded, would be committed to a politics not of enforced private revelation but rather of engaged public reason. This sort of public religion that could guide and illuminate without

[222] S. D. Smith, *On the Square*…, p. 85.

being authoritarian would need to be ecumenical, Neuhaus maintained; it would need to encompass – and in a genuine and not merely cosmetic way – Mainline, Jews, Catholics, Lutherans, evangelicals, fundamentalists. In the prevailing secular climate critics are quick to suspect authors who take a theological perspective. But in the *Naked Public Square,* Neuhaus's providence-oriented approach to his era missed not in dogmatism but in sober humility. We can be confident that there is a providential design, he thought, but we can at best catch glimpses of what it is. So we are left to practice 'that faith filled modesty by which Christians seek to apprehend, however tentatively, the meaning of the penultimate present in relation to the ultimate future'. God may well have 'surprises in store'. And so it is just possible that, [he thought] 'these despised moral majoritarians may turn out to be the first wave of the democratic renewal of the twenty-first century'.[223]

Neuhaus expected that an attempt to achieve the "naked public square", to establish the sovereignty of the state, liquidating the greatest achievement of human freedom, the Christian division of *sacrum* and *profanum,* might continue over "the longer term – say, the next thirty to one hundred years". The mood of those who recognized the presence of transcendental religion, not just the "religion" of spiritual well being, as a prerequisite of human freedom, and a barrier against a slide to a monistic, jealous ideology grounded in the imperial self as its anthropology may thus have been gloomy. But the more the grounds of a secular society have been questioned, the more aggressive its proponents have become, with the courts, not only in America, essentially following suit.[224] Neuhaus's call for a restoration of a public philosophy in a truly ecumenical mood through reasoned mutual deliberation remains valid, although he knew that an effort to devise forms

> […] which can revive rather than destroy the liberal democracy that is required by a society that would be pluralistic and free may not succeed, or succeed only in such a degree that would find us the mortals in a permanent state of alienation. But, it may be that God's grace is such that what has been done by human beings can be undone by human beings [and we may be able to muster] the imagination to move beyond present polarizations [and] become partners in rearticulating the religious base of the democratic experiment.[225]

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[223] *Ibidem*, p. 85–86.

[224] But the courts in the United States have recently taken a new path in interpreting the First Amendment. From "Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free School District" of 1993, through "Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia" of 1995 to "Cutter v. Wilkinson" of 2005, the US Supreme Court has modified its position. But the Court still treats religion like any other form of speech, for instance pornography, not as a distinctive category of reality, a source of ontologically grounded moral arguments engaging the public in a conversation about the common good. This trivializes religion, reduces it to a hobby to be tolerated, without any claim of forcing the public to reconsider its moral aims seriously. See: G. V. Bradley, *Religious Liberty in the American Republic…*; J. Hitchcock, *The Supreme Court and Religion…*, Vol. 2: *From 'Higher Law' to 'Sectarian Scruples'.*

[225] Quoted in S. D. Smith, *On the Square…*, p. 86. Looking with hindsight, Neuhaus was surprised how in 1984 certain issues dominated the discourse about the *Naked Public Square*: for instance, the shadow of the Cold War and the Vietnam War, the conflict between those "who do and those who do not agree with the proposition that 'on balance and considering the alternatives, America is a force for good in the world'". But a more important issue then seemed the challenge from people described as "secular humanists", that is "the band of supremely confident secular intellectuals" who took as their role models figures such as John Dewey, with the 1933 *Humanist Manifesto*. A generation later Neuhaus observed that this "species is almost extinct", but they have begun to "present themselves in a different guise. In public

Later in life, Neuhaus was both more and less optimistic about a "civil public square". More, since the Christian Right had entered the public square, less because he realized that the reality of the culture war prevents an effective and civilized public discussion. The encroachments from the "culture of death" and in general the "culture of the imperial Self" converted into ubiquitous rights might make the Augustinian postulate of retaining the freedom of the Church illusionary. A more robust Church engagement in public policy was needed to bring moral first principles to bear on public life. What was needed was not so much Counter-Reformation as evangelical witnessing and a defence of religious freedom against the encroachments of the monistic liberal state. *The Naked Public Square* made Neuhaus a fully-fledged public intellectual. But personally he was nearing the end of a road towards the Catholic Church. The title metaphor came to symbolize – and embolden – growing discontent with the extreme secularization of American public life. It became an effective rhetorical device to counter the trite and misleading "wall of separation" metaphor. Still, this debate about religion and politics continues to rage.

However, Neuhaus tried to articulate a wider argument. He was writing at a time when the liberal establishment, called the New Class by Neuhaus, began to show a growing cultural mistrust towards the majority and defined common culture as a problem to be "corrected". Technocratic effectiveness and management of differences by conflict resolution and psychotherapeutic mentality were to be substituted for other sources of allegiance. Religion was one such "obstacle" to such a progressive idea, unless subordinated to welfare liberalism as its spiritual, psychotherapeutic department. Religion was not treated any more as an important source of social solidarity and meaning. An efficient, caring, liberal state managing conflicts was to be put in its place. *The Naked Public Square* showed the fallacy of such thinking. It was a repudiation of the new liberal-left paradigm of ideas and ideological prejudices. This paradigm stated that the existing cultural narrative and social solidarity were rooted in a wrong anthropology. The alternative personal and social ethics were from now on to be built on the anthropology of the unencumbered moral imperial self. Neuhaus showed that the liberal-left establishment's image of this new order was wrong and his voice was one of the most powerful ones to challenge it.

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education there is less frequently a frontal assault on Christianity and the Judeo-Christian moral tradition. Almost nobody today is explicitly proposing a 'religion of secularism' or 'a common faith' to replace biblical religion. But the religions and quasi religions of 'multiculturalism' are pervasive and they provide a more insidious replacement. The newly imagined religions of native Americans and devotions to Mother Earth and her pantheon of nature gods and goddesses are commonplace in school curricula. The currents of thought that now run under the banner of 'postmodernism' are a major factor in undermining the former confidence of secularists who opposed religion in the name of Enlightenment rationality". *1984 and Now*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 232.

Liberalny monizm i wojna kultur. Richard J. Neuhaus i moralne imperialne „ja”

Autor poruszył zagadnienie liberalnego monizmu jako doktryny o pretensjach totalitarnych – stojących w centrum wojny o kulturę. Podejmuje analizę liberalnego monizmu i antropologii stojącej u jego podstawy na przykładzie ich krytyki, dokonanej przez wybitnego amerykańskiego teologa i intelektualisty Richarda J. Neuhausa.