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Public Theology, Civil Religion, and American Catholicism

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Abstract
David J. O'Brien takes up some of the problems of Catholicism and American public life. A panel of Dr. David DeLaura, Avalon Foundation Professor and Chair of the Department of English, University of Pennsylvania, Rev. Dr. J. Bryan Hehir, Secretary, Dept. of Social Development and World Peace of the United States Catholic Conference, and Dr. Rodger Van Allen, Professor of Religious Studies, Villanova University gave remarks after the lecture.

Comments
Boardman Lecture XXVI. Edited and foreword by Joanne D. Bosky.

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The George Dana Boardman Lectureship in Christian Ethics
(Founded 1899)

XXVI

Public Theology, Civil Religion,
and American Catholicism

Delivered Before
The University of Pennsylvania
October 29, 1986

By
David J. O'Brien
Associate Professor of History
Holy Cross College

Including Responses to the Lecture
By
David Delaura
Avalon Foundation Professor and Chair
Department of English
University of Pennsylvania

Rev. J. Bryan Hehir
Secretary, Dept. of Social Development and World Peace,
United States Catholic Conference; and
Senior Research Fellow, Kennedy Institute of Ethics,
Georgetown University

And

Rodger Van Allen
Professor of Religious Studies
Villanova University

Edited by Joanne D. Bosky
Foreword

The twenty-sixth George Dana Boardman Lecture in Christian Ethics at the University of Pennsylvania was delivered by Professor David J. O’Brien of the Department of History of Holy Cross College. Prof. O’Brien is the author of American Catholics and Social Reform: The New Deal Years, and The Renewal of American Catholicism, as well as a vast number of articles and papers. Extremely active in both the academic, church, and larger communities, Prof. O’Brien’s achievements and contributions are too numerous to cite. To name a few, his activities range from Research Consultant to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on the Observance of the Bicentennial, to Director of the Institute for Justice and Peace at Stonehill College, to membership in the National Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order.

Dr. O’Brien’s lecture was delivered in the afternoon of October 29, 1986, and a panel providing the occasion for open discussion was held later that evening in response. The panel was moderated by Prof. Stephen N. Dunning, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and was made up of three respondents: Dr. David DeLaura, Avalon Foundation Professor and Chair of the Department of English, University of Pennsylvania; The Rev. Dr. J. Bryan Hehir, Secretary, Dept. of Social Development and World Peace, United States Catholic Conference, and Senior Research Fellow, Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University; and Dr. Rodger Van Allen, Professor of Religious Studies, Villanova University. The panel members’ opening remarks are included in this publication.

I would like to thank many people including Prof. Robert A. Kraft, Leonard Norman Primiano, Prof. Guy R. Welbon, and especially Dr. Ramsey, without whom this publication could not have been prepared.

Joanne D. Bosky
Faculty, 1986-87

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The George Dana Boardman Lectureship Committee
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Professor Stephen N. Dunning
The Reverend Stanley E. Johnson, Chaplain of the University
Professor Robert A. Kraft
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Professor Joseph R. Washington
Professor Guy R. Welbon
The scene is Chicago, the year 1972, the occasion an interview with George McGovern on the day following his nomination as the Democratic candidate for President of the United States. As McGovern emerges from the bathroom to greet his guest, the interviewer, Norman Mailer, has a revelation, a "simple epiphany": "In America, the country was the religion." The scene shifts to Miami and the Republicans. John Cardinal Krol, Archbishop of Philadelphia and President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, delivers the benediction, an unexceptional blending of civic and religious symbols begging God's blessing on the nation. He then stands arm in arm with Richard Nixon and Spiro T. Agnew and the understandably optimistic Republicans sing "God Bless America." Four years later, and the camera catches a team of Catholic bishops, emerging first from a conference with Jimmy Carter to tell the press they are disappointed, then, more pleased, from a meeting with Gerald Ford. A firestorm of controversy explodes, quieted when the bishops indicate not too convincingly that they are concerned with many issues and expect voters to make up their own minds. Another election year, 1980. The bishops are quieter, their people slip into the Republican camp, and commentators speak of an alliance between Catholics and the New Right. Four years later the press is filled with stories of John Cardinal O'Connor's displeasure with Vice Presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro and New York Governor Mario Cuomo. The latter surprisingly meets the Cardinal's criticism by speaking eloquently from a platform at Notre Dame on the responsibilities of the Catholic politician.

Meanwhile, the bishops capture national attention by preparing a pastoral letter on nuclear weapons, telling the President, one cartoonist thought, to "praise the Lord and /\ the ammunition." By establishing some clear moral rules governing deterrence, they set themselves on a collision course with the government. Another team of bishops is writing a letter on economic justice, raising
equally serious problems not only about national policy but also about national values and private interests. The pastoral letters suggest to Congressman Henry Hyde that the church is becoming the left wing of the Democratic party at prayer, which surprises Governor Cuomo. In fact, a short time later the bishops' lobbyists in Congress, assisted by Hyde, hold up important civil rights legislation by demanding a rider against abortion, shattering a long standing Washington coalition. Along the way, of course, the bishops still float a bit above the battle. They are concerned, they say, with the moral dimensions of public policy; otherwise they are disinterested and non-partisan. Out in the trenches, with Cuomo and Hyde, the choices are tougher than that. What the peace movement did to the Jewish component of American liberalism, abortion threatens to do to the Catholic. If Catholics adopted the multi-issue approach of the episcopal conference, they might have voted Democratic, thereby accepting responsibility for the continued practice of abortion and, more worrisome, lending legitimacy to that segment of the political culture which treats the issue solely as a matter of women’s rights. On the other hand, if they took the quite traditional single issue approach, they might have voted Republican and thereby accepted responsibility for policies on the arms race, Central America, and the domestic economy which ran directly against church teaching. Catholics who wished to adhere to Joseph Cardinal Bernardin’s "seamless garment" would have done well to emulate the bishops by keeping their politics to themselves, an option of course not open to party activists, office holders and office seekers.²

In this paper I would like to take up a few of the problems of Catholicism and American public life which lie behind this political homelessness. Elsewhere I have written about the historical development of Catholic social teaching, the relationship between Catholicism and the American civil religion, and the context of contemporary Catholicism within which the pastoral letters must be understood.³ What I would like to do now is examine the basic structure of those letters, comment on its major elements, and suggest some directions for future reflection.
The Structure

Early in the pastoral on nuclear weapons the bishops speak of "two styles of teaching" in the post-conciliar church. That teaching, like their letter, has two purposes, to help Christians form their conscience and to help shape the public moral consensus which informs political decisions. The letters, therefore, have two overlapping but distinct audiences: Catholics (or Christians) themselves and the American people as a whole. Accordingly, two modes of discourse are used: one, addressed to Christians, is based upon the life and teachings of Jesus, as found in the Scriptures and understood in the tradition of the church. The other, aimed at many who are not Christian, is based upon "certain key moral principles" which arise from "a law written on the human heart by God." The letter reflects this dualism in its structure, as the first section is an effort to develop a theology of peace while the fourth, pastoral in character, calls Christians to study, prayer and action. In between are two long sections on policy in which there are references to papal documents and Catholic thinkers, but almost none to Jesus or the Scriptures. The language is that of social ethics, the categories those of the just war tradition. At times one can almost feel the difference, as if sitting in a Notre Dame classroom in part one and a church basement in part four, while parts two and three take place around a large, rather intimidating table at the Pentagon.4

Rarely has there been a better expression of the paradox of religious fervor and taken for granted secularity at the heart of the American experience. In their letter on the economy, in an early draft, the bishops speak of the danger of a "spiritually schizoid" existence in the apparent opposition between Christian discipleship and daily life.5 Of course, this is what we expect from bishops, for attempting to live by one's beliefs is a matter of simple integrity. But the letters, to say nothing of the bishops' actions, demonstrates that it is not as easy as it sounds. A deeply committed Christian would be uncomfortable with Pentagon discussions of how many indirect, unintended deaths can be tolerated in a strike on a military facility; the same committed Christian, if a Pentagon
official, would be equally uncomfortable with talk of conscientious objection and discipleship which includes love of enemies. When the bishops themselves, in the in-house style of teaching, refer to American society as “increasingly estranged from Christian values” and “increasingly secularized” (in early drafts “neo-pagan”) one begins to wonder whether it is possible after all to live with Christian integrity in the United States. Pacifists and advocates for the poor, such as those in the Catholic Worker movement, worry that the bishops have made too many concessions to the state. Subcultural restorationists like James Hitchcock and comfortable denominationalists like Michael Novak worry that they have compromised their specifically religious authority by meddling in political matters. One side would call them to be outsiders, speaking truth to power; the other would remind the bishops that they are insiders, responsible for maintaining national unity and morale in the face of external dangers and ministering to people in ways which meet personal religious needs. The bishops oddly appear to be insiders and outsiders at once. They affirm pacifism as an option for individuals and speak eloquently of a preferential option for the poor; they also insist on the obligation of the state to defend its citizens and they bend over backward to respect the autonomy of the political and economic orders. Spiritual schizophrenia indeed!

Yet the bishops and most Catholics are in fact both critics and custodians of the status quo. Once American Catholics may have thought of themselves as outsiders, with responsibility primarily to defend and promote their own interests. Even now the church remains tied to those outside through its own poor and marginalized, its presence among the nation’s poor and homeless, its contacts with Catholics in other lands, and its own conscience, which suspects that Jesus would be with the poor and the victims of violence. But Catholics are no longer on the margins of American society; they are in banks and boardrooms, universities and think tanks, Congress and the Pentagon. Their public responsibilities begin with the realization that they have helped make things what they are. Bishops and church members are, and wish to be, disciples and citizens all at once, and this is no abstract matter. As Thomas

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Bender has argued, most Americans live in two worlds, "one more or less communal, one more or less associational." In private they respond to "the daily and infinite calls of community," in public their lives are "circumscribed within certain limits" by institutions which "exercise exceptional authority over the general interests of the country." Personally and every day they shift between "two psychological repertoires," one for family, friends and church, another for work, economic life and public business. One is marked by idealism, warmth, shared symbols, at best love, the other by reason, hard bargaining, reasonable standards and, at best, justice. This is how we all get by, changing our language, our style, our feelings as we move from church basement to bureaucratic meeting room, and the bishops do the same.\(^7\)

Integrity, it seems, is and will remain hard won and neither sectarian witness nor denominational accommodation offers a better route than do the bishops. Catholics remain, in the Council's words, "citizens of two cities," called to "discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit." "We must judge and decide not only as individuals, preserving for ourselves the luxury of a clean conscience, but also as members of society, taking on a common burden and responsibility," Thomas Merton once wrote. Cardinal Berardin in describing the stance of the bishops, agrees. "Despite the radical moral skepticism of the pastoral letter about ever containing the use of nuclear weapons within justifiable limits, the bishops were not persuaded that this judgement should lead to an ecclesial posture of withdrawal from dialogue or participation in the public life of the nation." It is a "precarious posture," he admits, but preferable either to refusal to address the issues or restriction of the conversation to Christians alone.\(^8\)

The bishops thus recognize, it seems to me, that sectarians who urge a strategy of radical resistance and witness under a specifically Christian banner, share with those who would sharply distinguish between religion and public affairs a tendency to separate religion and life, Christianity and history, a separation which is profoundly un-Catholic and, in both church and society, irresponsible. At its foundation the tendency toward segmentation is a product of the natural dynamics of a voluntary church in a
pluralistic society; the supposed conflict between church and world defines the church and renders it important, inspires commitment, and, in the Catholic case, grounds a distinction between laity and clergy which stabilizes religious authority and secures religious institutions. Sectarians, on both the right and left, concerned for the integrity of the church and fidelity to conscience, run the risk of irresponsible exemption from the public debate. Accommodationists, concerned for the very real responsibilities of public life in pluralistic society, run the risk of compromising the demands of the Gospel and privatizing religion. In saying both—and rather than either/or, the bishops give flesh to the image of the church as first of all the people of God, they adopt a stance toward "the world" which is altogether new for the modern Catholic church, and they risk an independent critique of the church in the very process of seeking a positive public impact for the community of faith. The road to integrity leads the church and the Christian to search for meaning in the public world, but it also leads through dangerous surroundings and multiple temptations.  

The Public Debate

The heading for discussion of the public purpose of the letters could be John Courtney Murray's phrase, "the eternal return of natural law." As early as John Carroll, American Catholics recognized that, when they left the church for the public arena, they had to leave their distinctive symbols behind. Insofar as public life revolved around Christianity, Catholics argued it was sectarian. Public issues would have to be discussed in terms intelligible to others yet consistent with Catholic beliefs. Isaac Hecker developed an American apologetic based upon his conviction of the reasonableness and fairness of his fellow citizens. A century later John A. Ryan and John Courtney Murray extracted papal teachings from their theological and historical context and grasped what they took to be their natural law core: ideas of human dignity and human rights which eased the process of engagement in American public discourse.
For Murray 'the life of man in society, under government, is founded on truths, on a certain body of objective truth, universal in its import, accessible to reason, definable, defensible.' Public life required a consensus, 'a core of agreement,' a conviction 'among the people that everything is not in doubt.' In America that consensus, the 'key moral principles' to which the bishops refer, grounds a public philosophy. Robert Bellah illuminated a civil religion which was 'an understanding of the American experience in light of ultimate and universal reality.' Murray described a civil consensus which arose from 'experience illuminated by principles, given a construction by a process of philosophical reflection.' Thus the public debate is philosophical, not theological. Bryan Hehir has argued again and again that the complexity of public problems, the need to address a pluralistic audience and to mobilize people across denominational boundaries requires appeal to a common language, found now in conciliar formulations of the dignity of the human person, and the consequent values of human rights and human interdependence. Hehir, Cardinal Bernadin, Archbishop Roach and Bishop Malone all argue that the church does not propose its own specific religious teachings as standards of public policy. Instead, it generates from its beliefs perspectives that are, or at least ought to be, shared. With Murray they hold these truths to be self-evident; they presume that other Americans do as well. If they do not, then Catholics have become, as Murray suspected they might, the last defenders of 'authentic' American values and, as Murray put it, it will be up to 'others, not Catholics, to ask themselves whether they still [share] the consensus which first fashioned the American people into a body politic.'

In Murray's day there was a broad movement in support of natural law in American culture. He could appeal to consensus historians, conservative philosophers and cold war affirmations of the American democratic faith. In addition, there was a small but talented cadre of Catholic philosophers inspired by Jacques Maritain who could be rallied to the cause, even if the institutional church was slow to accept the conclusions they drew from natural law premises. Today, the situation is reversed; the institutional church
strongly and consistently supports the foundations of natural law, but in the culture at large there may be many drawn to the conclusion, but far fewer to the premises, as the abortion debate indicates. Furthermore, a century of philosophical speculation and the corrosive impact of the sociology of knowledge have called into question not only the idea of human nature but the possibility of public discourse. Jesuit John Coleman speaks of Murray’s “failure to admit that his own theory of natural law rested on particularistic Catholic principles and theories which do not claim widespread support.” Yet, even in the Catholic community, it is theologians, not philosophers, who must be called upon to champion the bishops’ project; those who do so are far from enthusiastic about the bishops’ policy proposals, far more excited by the prospect of a scriptural, evangelical ethic linked to a prophetic community.

There is another, more serious problem. Murray was quite self-consciously an elitist, who shared with his conservative opponents a skepticism about democracy. “Society is rescued from chaos only by a few men, not by the many,” Murray wrote. “It is only the few who understand the disciplines of civility and are able to sustain them in being and hold in check the forces of barbarism that are always threatening to force the gates of the city.” For Murray, barbarism was an unwillingness to engage in “reasonable conversation according to reasonable laws.” For the reasonable few, the public consensus rested on truth claims; for the many it rested on faith. The conservative Catholics who shaped the anti-liberal teachings Murray sought to correct had been terrified by radicals who stirred up popular passion. Murray was almost equally hysterical about “barbarians” in Brooks Brothers suits who undermine rational standards of judgement and corrupt the inherited intuitive wisdom by which the people have always lived by creating a climate of doubt and bewilderment in which clarity about the larger aims of life is dimmed and the self-confidence of the people is destroyed.”

Leaving aside the erroneous belief that “the inherited intuitive wisdom by which the people [had] always lived” had much to do with natural law truths of liberty and equality, one can only comment that this conception of natural law leaves little room for the rough and tumble of the ideological marketplace or the give and take of
politics. Murray did speak of civil conspiracies, but one suspects he would have little stomach for Governor Cuomo's argument that the bishops should persuade the public before asking politicians to legislate morality, much less for Michael Novak’s candid appeal to businessmen to use their money and influence to support ideas coincident with their understanding of the public good. It is one thing to affirm cultural freedom, quite another to accept not only the "disciplines of civility" by the cultural conflicts of a democratic society.  

Frederick Olafson observed after reading Murray that he still held to what Olafson called "the traditional Catholic view" that "the individual conscience will buckle under the weight of the moral responsibility assigned to it by liberalism and that it is foolish to expect a just and stable social order to emerge out of the competition of moral pressure groups." The pastoral letters suggest that the church is now willing to enter into that competition, but the actions of church leaders do not. One diocese which I recently studied reflected the contradictions so evident in national politics. In 1963 that diocese responded to the race crisis by an educational program designed to bring about public engagement in the parishes; education failed to accomplish this result, and the race issue went on the back burner. During the Vietnam war the bishops shared the moral anguish of the people, but simply outlined the bifurcated teachings of Vatican II and urged Catholics to make up their own minds. But, in January, 1973, after the Supreme Court decision on abortion, the bishops not only committed the diocese to oppose the decision, but encouraged direct political action from letter writing campaigns to collections by pro-life lobbying groups in order to achieve a specific solution, a constitutional amendment. Thus it is not at all clear that the dialogue arising from the reading of natural law in the arms and economic letters has or will displace the reading of natural law in Catholic sexual teaching as the political paradigm of contemporary Catholicism. The issue at stake is only partly theoretical; it is even more the degree of Catholic acceptance of the imperatives of democracy.

Yet the bishops do seem to believe that people should be active agents of their own history. Contemporary church teaching has
moved far beyond Murray in affirming democratic participation in politics, economics and culture. In the United States the bishops have lamented the decline of political participation, they have recognized the impact of poverty and discrimination in bringing this about, and they have not only called for more democratic sharing of political and economic power but they have forwarded that goal by their financial and moral support of community organizations. While still holding fast to the idea that subsidiary organizations beyond the control of government provide the major vehicles for participation, they have not ignored the fact that the state and the corporation constitute centers of power which tend to marginalize such decentralized institutions. Human rights "will not be secure unless they include actual political participation and an effective voice in policy decisions that establish the boundaries of subsidiary institutions," Robin Levin has written. "The right to participation is essential not only in the state but in state-like corporations or agencies that exert a substantial control over the lives of persons." Levin argues that a public philosophy or theology adequate to our needs must include that right; this contention is supported in much church teaching, but it will require a far more democratic approach to public philosophy than the bishops have yet risked, and perhaps than natural law allows.  

A Community of Conscience

John Courtney Murray argued that the church-state question had been transformed from an institutional question to one of conscience, so that the Christian impact on public life depended upon the "quality and credibility of Christian witness in secular society." Bryan Hehir places the pastoral letters in this context: the church has a "double capacity for dialogue," he argues, tied to its "capacity for moral persuasion of its own community and of the civil community." Thus, while addressing the larger public, the church also seeks "to build a community of conscience, a body of citizens with a commitment to human rights and a concept of social justice which allows them to make concrete judgements of where and how
to stand on questions of legislation, social policy, and specific choices facing their neighborhood and nation. Since the earliest social encyclicals, Catholic activists have searched for ways to popularize the church's social teaching and inspire Catholics to play a constructive role in public life. Vatican II exploded on the American church at a time when the racial crisis, urban disorders, and Vietnam were shattering domestic complacency, so that effort to persuade Catholics to learn and live their church's social teaching intensified. The limitations of this effort are evident not only in the highly publicized dissent of some Catholics from the bishops' teachings, but even more in the preoccupation of Church leaders with "implementation" of the letters. The bishops made little investment in educating their people around the nuclear weapons pastoral; this time they intend to do better, but their efforts may stumble over misconceptions of the nature of the problem.

Philip Hurnon, who is perhaps more familiar with Catholic parish life than any contemporary church leader, argues that the problem in presenting the pastorals to the laity is that, for them, the relationship of religion to public life is only secondarily a problem of ethics, it is primarily a problem of meaning.

In the nineteenth century, the church persuaded the immigrants to practice their faith by coming to church, supporting the pastor, and accepting the clergy's control of church property. The process tended to undercut popular devotions which provided immediate channels to the divine and to center attention instead on the sacraments, controlled by the priest. Pastors knew that, to unite their often divided congregations, they had best concentrate on religion. They would and did become involved in politics to defend the interests of the church or to assist their own people, but generally they left politics and economics alone. In the early stages of community formation this strategy corresponded well with the actual needs of immigrants who lived in cultures of poverty, but a price was paid, for the economic and social progress of the church's members was deprived of religious significance. At the end of the nineteenth century, a group of American Catholic leaders attempted to point the American church towards a mission of participation in American life as active cooperation with divine providence in
forwarding the Kingdom of God, but they were defeated and the American church become instead a subculture whose major concern was to maintain the faith and loyalty of its assimilating members.

Even its most vigorous ventures into public life, as in campaigns against birth control, immoral films and godless communism, had far more to do with the morale and unity of the Catholic community than with concern for public life. Economic and social progress and political influence were welcome, to be sure, but they were not seen as opportunities for evangelization or for carrying out an authentic religious vocation. Religion was confined to church and its networks of families, ethnic groups and neighborhoods. A minority argued that becoming American would enable the church to become more secure and respected and bring its resources to complete the unfinished business of American democracy but, having abandoned their predecessors' faith in America's providential mission, they lacked a theology or spirituality appropriate to that enterprise. Almost without knowing it, liberal Catholics remained ambassadors from the Catholic subculture. When it began to unravel, there was little to prevent the collapse of lay movements.22

This is not the entire story, to be sure. On the one hand, Catholic education provided a paradigm operative for most Catholics. The defense of Catholic schools, the assignment to the public schools of responsibility for every problem plaguing American society, and the self-interested approach to education as a public issue most accurately reflected the dynamics of the Catholic subculture in the twentieth century. On the other hand, the quite different history of Catholic charities, with its modernized administration, cooperation with community chest campaigns and positive interaction with the emerging welfare state provided a less self-centered, more public spirited experience. But the complex role of social services was rarely drawn upon for homiletic exhortation or religious education, in judgement on their society, as if problems were not their problems and its future was not their own.23 At first glance Vatican II and the leadership of John F. Kennedy seemed to bring Catholic public philosophy into wider currency within the church. In the earliest days of renewal, the most enthusiastic
church reformers were from the middle class and the action was in the suburbs, the Catholic colleges and universities, and the still vigorous remnants of the Commonweal-Cross Currents-CFM-Catholic Action networks. But things did not work out as expected. The combination of theological transformation and sociological arrival collided with the simultaneous upheavals of the 1960s to unravel the presuppositions of the older Catholic subculture. If the characteristic slogan of the short-lived age of Vatican II was "a new generation" American and Catholic; the experience of a decade was summed up in the words of Mary Gordon's heroine in Final Payments: "I would have to invent a life for myself."  

Top down approaches to internal renewal and prophetic calls for radical engagement with racism, poverty and war slowly gave way to bottom up strategies modeled first in religious communities of women and later taken into the parishes by charismatic renewal, Marriage Encounter and religious education professionals working for a sharing of faith in families and small groups. This approach brought with it an ecclesiology which emphasized community, a radical egalitarianism framed in a theology of gift, and an evangelical piety centered upon Scripture and the person of Jesus. The language of ministry masked a radical departure from the sacramental piety, hierarchical polity and clerical monopoly which had characterized the pre-conciliar church. Personal and group identity became more Christian, less Catholic, more focused on the distinctive experience of Christian faith and love, less on the heritage of church teaching and natural law.

It is no accident, then, that the dramatic policy assessment of the pastoral letters contrasts with the general, vague prescriptions of the pastoral sections. Nor should the occasional bursts of evangelical fervor, which mark both letters, be surprising. There are vigorous social action groups around the country anxious to help the bishops implement the letters; they are far more comfortable with nonviolence, the fundamental option for the poor and life style than with the conditions governing deterrence or the evaluation of strategies for creating jobs and easing the burdens of debt. The pastoral on weapons contained no ringing call for political action and no suggestion that, in addition to considering ending
employment in defense industries, Catholics might search for peacemaking work. Early drafts of the economics pastoral contained powerful Vatican II statements on the laity’s call to pursue holiness in daily life. “Men and women in business, on farms, and in factories, in government, in scientific and educational institutions, and in every other field of labor can achieve true sanctity when they respond to the call of discipleship in the midst of their work.” In the current draft these quotes are eliminated, three paragraphs on the vocation are reduced to two sentences, followed quickly by warnings against a “throw away society.” New sections on family life say nothing of nurturing civic engagement but instead warn against “self gratification and excessive individualism” and urge witness to countercultural values.26

Bryan Hehir argues that the public church sustains its double insertion into public life by “a constant process within the church of articulating and examining the public dimensions of faith.” To carry on the dialogue with others, Catholics must become convinced that “issues of public policy are the business of the Christian community as part of our faith commitment.” Unfortunately, few forums for such articulation and examination exist. While the bishops accept the idea of a “structured pluralism” within the church, they have set clear limits to the internal debate and have done little to forward public conversation. Moreover, John Coleman argued a few years ago that he knew of no place in the United States where a pastoral strategy based on such considerations was being carried out. To build a public church with a credible institutional witness and a vigorous community of conscience, therefore, may require serious reconsideration of the adequacy of public philosophy, of the appropriateness of education and implementation as vehicles for forwarding the project, and of the separation of church and world, and thus the subordination of the laity, which stands behind the dualism of the pastoral letters.27
Civil Religion

Each side of the pastoral letters' two teaching style, then, leads to serious questions of the relationship between religion and public life. The bishops have courageously developed and applied Murray's public philosophy, with less clarity they have suggested a pastoral strategy aimed at making public responsibility an essential ingredient in Catholic life. The bishops, at least in these letters, hope to form a people 'who shape their personal lives in such a way that they make a public difference.' Yet this remains an unfulfilled objective, as the contradictions in episcopal behavior and the pattern of Catholic voting indicate. John Coleman, attentive to the sociological context of the American church, argues that one reason is that Catholicism supplies no adequate ideal of citizenship, one which might overcome the dualism of the letters or the deeper ambivalence in American religion. Fully aware of the virtues of public philosophy, he nevertheless shared with Robert Bellah a concern for the absence of that love for the republic, that habit of heartfelt solidarity required before ethics can guide the public conversions. Taking issue with Murray and Mehir, Coleman argues cautiously for a public theology.

The basic dilemma for public discourse seems to be that the more universal language system is symbolically thin, with little power to stir human hearts and minds to sacrifice, service, and deep love of the community, while the "thicker" more powerfully evocative language of the Bible often becomes exclusive divisive in public discourse, and overly particularistic. It rallies hearts which share its history and nuances without providing an opening to those who stand as linguistic outsiders to its forms of discourse. In the absence, however, of a vigorous retrieval of understanding of republican theory and virtue, there is little else available to correct the individualistic bias of American liberal philosophy.

So far Coleman's hesitant appeal to civil religion as a way of moving beyond "spiritual schizophrenia" stands almost alone. In the past, however, Catholics have in fact drawn upon the symbols of the nation to give meanings to their public lives, though few reflected on that fact. Americanist Catholics of the last century wanted to
assimilate immigrants as rapidly as possible because they thought the future America was making was a closer approach to the coming Kingdom of God. In World War II and the Cold War, Catholics came close to identifying the nation as the instrument of God's purpose in the world. Liberals among them differed from conservatives mainly in the choice of means. Changes in Catholic consciousness after the Vatican Council had at least as much to do with changed understandings of America as with the theological and pastoral outcomes of the Council. America, for many, turned out to be not quite what it was supposed to be. Some responded by returning to a remade church, others tried to restore the Catholic subculture, and still others found meaning in setting the church against the world, as had an earlier generation of American Protestants. Only scattered remnants believed that active participation in public life could help realize age old human dreams, much less the purposes of God.

Recently Leonard Sweet began an article on American millenialism by saying that the trouble with the present is that the future isn't what it used to be. He went on to quote Jacob Bronowski: "we are not afraid of the future because of the bomb; we are afraid of the bomb because we have no faith in history." John Courtney Murray knew that public philosophy could not solve this problem. "Natural law does not promise to transform society into the City of God," Murray wrote. It only prescribes, "for the purposes of law and social custom, that minimum of morality which must be observed by the members of society if a social environment is to be human and habitable." It is well to recall that H. Richard Neibuhr, after completing the Social Sources of Denominationalism, felt he had adequately defined the stream of American Christianity but had not discovered what made the water flow. The result of the question was The Kingdom of God in America and, later, a general theory of American Christianity as a dialectic between order and movement, with the dynamic element provided by shifting understandings of the coming reign of God. Millenialism in one or another form was a central theme of American Protestant history. Premillenial thought may have resulted in a certain fatalism and passivity, but postmillenial optimism once fueled populists protests and progressive reform.
Indeed, it could be argued that one reason for the decline of mainline churches and the prosperity of their evangelical and fundamentalist brethren has been that the latter have preserved a sense of the movement of history, though often in premillenial and apocalyptic terms. Among Catholics, it seems to me, one reason for the failure to develop a social gospel is the divorce of social ethics from eschatology. The best example I can give is found in the pastoral letter on war and peace, where the careful discussions of policy are followed by a section which begins with suspicions of defeat, anticipating that persecution and martyrdom may become normal.

To catch the difference, one could reread *Pacem in Terris* or *Gaudium et Spes*.

Pope John pictured the human community at a crossroads, one road leading to deepening division and war, the other toward realization of the age old human dream of a single human family. Pope John’s was a positive document because it made the pursuit of one vision rather than avoidance of the other its central theme. Peace-making was not war avoidance but the building of international understanding, even among people who differed fundamentally on religion and politics, a goal which Murray’s understanding of natural law would disallow. The Council went further. The often quoted sentence about the human family’s “hour of supreme crisis” is followed by these words: “Moving gradually together and everywhere more conscious already of its oneness, this family cannot accomplish its task of constructing for all men everywhere a world more genuinely human unless each person devotes himself with renewed determination to the cause of peace.” Pope John and the Council uncovered the underlying dream which always lay behind the notion of natural law, the dream that all men and women are in fact one, and that the real objective of the human project is the reconciliation of men and women with God and one another. This hopeful, optimistic vision, so central to the Council, is all but totally missing from the peace pastoral and, to my regret, is shrinking in the economics pastoral.

Public philosophy, then, can usefully create space for public discussion of the morality of specific policy choices; it cannot transcend those choices or provide guidance to those who believe
that the "minimum of morality" requires the liberation of people. The enabling symbols which once galvanized Catholic immigrants as that had Baptist and Methodist farmers, was not natural law truths but a dream of human freedom and liberation which concretely meant economic security, political participation, and the freedom to choose. Somehow the ethical norms, stripped from that dream, public philosophy without public theology, provides ethics not meaning and seems inadequate to the times in which we live. At the very least we would seem to require a dialogue between public philosophy and public theology at the level of what David Hollenbach calls "fundamental political theology," which includes basic questions of human nature, religious symbols, and historical meaning and destiny.\footnote{35}

The biggest obstacle to dialogue with the civil religion stems from the conviction of Catholics that their tradition is superior to the national so that the dialogue is essentially one way. In one of the few episcopal attempts to deal with civil religion, then Archbishop Bernardin called it "positively dangerous" unless there was "awareness that the nation stands under the higher judgement embodied in the ideas and symbols of theistic religion" (as if the religion of the republic were not theistic). Bernardin thought Americans had "tendency to think of themselves as enjoying a kind of privileged moral superiority," little noticing that Catholics were at least as guilty of that fault. As Murray put it, Catholics know "that the principles of Catholic faith and morality stand superior to, and in control of, the whole order of civil life."

He regarded the question of whether Catholicism was compatible with American democracy as "invalid as well as impertinent." It inverted the "order of values" and should be reversed. Bryan Hehir argues that "in the Catholic tradition the unique countervailing loyalty to any pretension to the absolutist state has been transcendent relationship of the citizen to God, mediated by the church." Hehir adds that "the church protects the transcendence of the person by providing people [with] independent ground on which to stand in assessing the claims made upon them by the state."\footnote{36} The great strength of Catholic social teaching therefore lies in the defense and promotion of human dignity and human rights; the most
vigorously debates about the ethics of the economics pastoral thus
center upon the bishops’ extension of social and economic rights.
The most compelling outcomes of the letters have to do with
conscientious objection, refusal of defense work, countercultural
lifestyle and advocacy on behalf of the poor.

These strengths arise from the absolute claims of the church,
which explains as well the often noted phenomenon of bishops here
and elsewhere who are conservative on internal church issues and
progressive on social justice.

But there are weaknesses in this approach, for public loyalty
easily gets squeezed between the claims of moral interest groups.
A church which claims to be the church and to teach with divine
authority demands of its member that they submit to its judgement.
The older social teaching, linked to the absolute claims of the
pre-conciliar church, generated near a prophetic critique of
liberalism and of industrial society, the newer teaching, placing
human dignity in the context of a more evangelical understanding of
faith, similarly generates social teaching sharp in its critical
commentary on contemporary social teaching sharp in its critical
commentary on contemporary society, but weak in its constructive
capacity, its ability to inspire or direct efforts to solve human
problems through democratic procedures. As Frederick Olafson
observed, Catholic claims tend to make public life either “servile”
or “secondary”.

Theologian Francis Fiorenza wrote recently that “insofar as the
particular beliefs and values of a society can serve as standards by
which the de facto praxis of a society or nation is fostered or
criticized, they provide significant cultural resources for the
church.” But surely the reverse is also true, for those same beliefs
and values may serve as standards against which the de facto praxis
of the church can be fostered or criticized. There are times and
circumstances when we wish to affirm the church as a critical
ground over against the state, and there are times when we wish to
affirm the shared values of our community over against the praxis
of our church. It is hard to understand how the Bishops can enter
the civil dialogue, must less encourage the dedicated and sacrificial
citizenship which they know the times require, unless they admit
that possibility and thus accept a more open, boundless and risky future.

Sidney Mead long ago noticed how the religion of the republic, by expanding horizons beyond religious subcultures, relativized the absolute claims of the sects, while Timothy Smith has noticed the manner in which the immigrant church drew upon more universal symbols of Catholic faith in the very process of defining a sense of peoplehood. If Vatican II did nothing else, it shattered the boundary lines between Catholics and others, so that the image of the people of God could no longer serve to segregate Catholics from their brothers and sisters. As Bishop Kenneth Untener said recently, "The church is part of what will pass away and become transfigured, incorporated into the Kingdom of God." Accordingly, he says, Catholics must "not claim too confidently to have answers" and they must move "beyond categories." "Even if we follow the Gospel, everything will not work out," he said. "We will have to find a way to make do for the time being and live with ambiguity and weakness and be honest about this when we preach." 88

On the level of public reflection, Richard Niebuhr spoke the same language in discussing the diverse ways in which, in dialectical fashion "the Kingdom of God had indeed been the dominant idea in American Christianity":

It helps us tolerate, understand and love those who express another phase of the Christian movement than our own group expresses; it warns us of our own limitations yet encourages us to do our own work with all our might and to seek unity not on the level of easy sentimentalism but of alive moral and intellectual conflict of those who contend fruitfully because they share a common faith. 89

Some Thoughts on Abortion and Politics

Archbishop O'Connor and others rightly point out that the citizen/politician who supports or permits abortion must accept responsibility for that choice. Surely he is correct. The other side of the coin is that those who choose to vote for a candidate or party on the basis of abortion must accept responsibility for that choice.
Responsibility cuts two ways. The bishops have at least as much work to do to get their logic straight as do the politicians. In exceedingly slippery fashion they move back and forth between single issues and multi-issues: we choose one or two issues on which to work—peace, abortion, Central America, hunger—simply because we have neither the time nor the talent to work on all of them at once. When we come to vote, we become multi-issue, trying to decide which party or candidate on balance seems best. Some find one issue of such great importance that it overrides all others, and generally this position deserves respect, especially if it is made with a full acknowledgment of responsibility. But at that point of political choice, the citizen/politician cannot have it both ways, single issue and multi-issue all at once. The person who would insist on the whole seamless garment simply has no choice; he or she is, unfortunately, a voter without a home or a politician without a constituency. To the extent that it is true, it is surely not a situation which is entirely someone else’s fault. We, bishops and the rest of us, have not done our jobs as well as we should. How we do that is a matter that requires a lot more discussion, but it is surely not hopeless. It will require us to become more positive than negative, to grasp what is the good news among all the bad and then learn how to announce that good news in terms that make sense to us and to our fellow citizens. That work perhaps requires the teaching skill of the O’Connors and the Bernadins, but it requires even more their pastoral skill. It also requires the political skills of the Mario Cuomos, and, yes, the Henry Hydes. For the moment, the bishops supposed students, Catholic and non-Catholic, and the politicians religious constituencies, Cuomo’s and Hyde’s, have every reason to feel frustrated and confused.

Bishops should call a moratorium on the use of the word “teach.” Of course, the bishops have the responsibility to teach, but on public matters this is a less than useful word. Who are they teaching? Other Catholics, politicians, the public at large? Would it not be more appropriate to say that the bishops, within the church, attempt to build a credible witness to the love of God by summoning the community to articulate its faith in the context of serious public issues, and then to act as spokespersons on behalf of
the church. In the public arena they do not teach but participate in a process of public dialogue aimed at building a public moral consensus, and this dialogue requires a degree of mutual respect which excludes the assumptions of superior wisdom contained in the word "teach." The less than impressive record of public teaching on birth control, immoral movies, sex education and abortion provides simply another reason to modify the language.

The church, and the bishops, have an altogether proper role to play in public life. The church's focus on the moral aspect of issues provides an indispensable counterweight to the inevitable tendency of democratic politics to minimize or exclude moral considerations or to seek the lowest moral common denominator. On the other hand, the citizen/politician who must make real choices in the here and now finds that all such choices are ambiguous. They must make those choices and, at the same time, struggle to improve the situation so that better choices are available. This work of the citizen/politician is not a less work than that of the bishops, nor is it the laity's work as distinguished from that of their pastors and teachers. The citizen/politician making these choices is as much the church as is the bishop. As Archbishop Weakland recently pointed out, the lay person does not cease to be church when he or she enters the world; they are not church only when they are in church. Nor, one might add, is the bishop any less church when he enters the voting booth or prays at a party convention. The bishop is right to insist that the lay person respect his role in the church; the lay Catholic is correct to insist that the bishop respect his or her role in the church, a role which is no less real when he or she is in the legislative hall or the party caucus than when he or she is in church.

If this is the case, then I would suggest that the public world is as appropriate a locus for theological reflection as is the church. Indeed it is the very ecclesial centeredness of theology that distorts and confuses the public discussion, perpetuating that historic turn which deprived extra ecclesial activity of religious meaning and generated forms of theological imperialism which baptized various persons and activities as anonymously Catholic. One might add that the discussion benefits only slightly when theology moves
from the church to the university. Catholics have learned in the last generation, not only from the great openings ushered in by Vatican II, but by the scandals and tragedies which preceded that event. While the world may not set the agenda for the church, care for the world is central to Christian faith, and the welfare of human beings and the historical project is in fact an appropriate test for Christian witness and for theology. Thus, taking up civil religion (or public religion, or the religion of the republic) as a partner in dialogue, taking seriously the idea that this culture, like others, has something to teach as well as something to learn, is not only an appropriate religious activity, but perhaps the central task of those who seriously wish to enrich public life. In fact, the meaning of our shared life as Americans could well be considered the central issue before the churches, linked not only to the religion and politics debate but to many of the central pastoral issues facing the church as well. In any event, until the civic issue is engaged, church leaders, episcopal and lay, might well adopt a more cautious and modest approach and take the time to examine the self-serving character of all too many of their arguments.

**Agendas**

Finally, of course, there is an agenda in all of this. On the public side there is the need to face up to that political homelessness I mentioned at the beginning, and at least start to work for the construction of alternatives more acceptable than those presently available. One starting point would be the connection between the church and community organizations at home. Another is the connection with sister churches abroad, both potential sources of constructive proposals for public policy. Another is the cultural task, central to the pastoral letters, to evangelize culture by attempting to demonstrate that the traditional American ideals of liberty and equality presuppose and require human solidarity as well, that placing personal lives in the service of public purposes is a way of living which can be filled with meaning and can even make life more interesting and alive. It means helping one another have...
the courage to speak of human dignity in academic centers, in banks and boardrooms and, yes, in the Pentagon. It means organizing people who share common values to promote those values in public life, it means all those things that have been done before in American history and need to be done again.

Public philosophy is essential to all this, of course, to move directly from eschatology to politics without ethics or what Reinhold Niebuhr saw, is to risk asceticism or apocalypticism. But that ethics must include, as Murray's does not, a positive role for democratic participation and for the conflicts that involves. We need a vision which will inspire that love for the world which the constructive impulse does not awaken, and a pastoral approach which affirms the possibilities of ordinary people and empowers them to play their role on the stage of history.

Internally the agenda focuses on the people of the church, on the idea so obvious it goes unnoticed that if the people are the church, they are the church all the time, not just when they are in the church. As most people most of the time are somewhere else, and as pastoral strategies which require more time at church are largely counterproductive to the public project, ecclesiology, liturgy, spirituality and ministry will have to center more and more on the lay life of lay people. "In America," Nathan Hatch writes, "the principle mediator of God's voice has not been the state, the church, councils, confessions, the ethnic group, the university, the college or the seminary; it has been, quite simply, the people." Contrary to Hatch's "democratic evangelism," the Catholic church saw itself as the principle, sometimes it seemed the only, mediator. It succeeded in part by allying itself with ethnic groups and, in many ways, becoming one itself. Isaac Hecker was alone in proposing a Catholic version of evangelical democracy, but he misunderstood Roman institutionalism and immigrant Catholicism and his vision bore little fruit. Today, however, with the radical transformation of those nineteenth century constructs, the ultramontane papacy and the immigrant church, American Catholics are experiencing a "democratization of mind" similar to that described by Hatch, Gordon Wood and Timothy Smith among pre Civil War Protestants. Immigrant Catholicism was in fact a people's church, but for under-
standable if regrettable reasons intellectual reflection centered on
the organization and its ideology.

If American Catholicism is to survive, even more if it is to
make a substantial contribution to public life, it will have to engage
directly the reality of voluntarism, the evangelical imperatives, and
the reliance upon popular support which are the inevitable by-
products of religious pluralism in a democratic society. Daniel Day-
Williams called twenty years ago for a more serious and system-
atic theological reflection on democracy; for Catholics it is a
major priority. That reflection could begin with the data of parish
formation, grass roots ethnic and political mobilization, business
unionism and community organization, move on to examination of
the dramatic economic and social advancement of Catholics which is
one of the world’s most dramatic stories of liberation, and conclude
with some assessment of the two major pastoral need of contem-
porary church, the empowerment of Hispanics and the mobilization
of the educated middle class.

Resisting the natural tendency to place the church at the center
of the symbolic world, which leads to conceptions of ministry which
focus almost exclusively on personal faith and community life,
thetical reflection and pastoral practice must place the future
Kingdom of God at the center, face up to the hard questions that
poses for a church which claims to be the church, and admit that
possibility that the Holy Spirit moves not only in the church, but in
the hearts of God’s people and at the center of human history.
Paralyzed by our desire for respectability and frightened by the
shattering experiences of our century, we have brushed aside the
hopeful optimism of American millennialism which once led others to
make the world we now must claim as our own. All the structural
analysis in the world will not change the fact that disciplines not of
civility but of freedom require appeal to conscience, to individuals
to determine to work together to make the world anew. I could
quote Walter Rauschenbush, who said that it was the purpose of
Christianity “to transform human society into the Kingdom of God by
regenerating all human relations and reconstituting them in accord-
ance with the Kingdom of God.” But I prefer the Catholic Isaac
Hecker, thought by some to be a closet Protestant. He had the
audacity to believe that Catholic Christianity was guided by the same Holy Spirit leading history and every person toward the same destiny of union with God. That confidence was not reason for complacency or for the grace of doing nothing or for surrender of the ideal of love for a lesser ideal of justice, but a call to action to bring love into life in a history which belongs to ordinary men and women. "Let us therefore arise and open our eyes to the bright future that is before us. Let us labor with a lively faith, a firm hope and a charity that knows no bounds, by every good work and good example, for the reign of God's Kingdom on earth."
RESPONSES TO THE LECTURE

I. David J. DeLaura

I will play Devil's Advocate, a sympathetic skeptic, toward David O'Brien's provocative paper. I suspect we need a clearer definition of "civil religion," and its relationship to the mainstream denominations and their social role. Does not the idea of "civil religion"—Ronald Reagan invoking God's name for every dismantling of a social program, but rarely of course attending a religious service himself—say anything about the "cooptation" and taming of religion in this country? I wish David O'Brien had more doubts about "it." Whatever "it" is. More incidentally, it has long been clear that even a Ronald Reagan (and certainly not the Republican Party) are not centrally serious about putting into effect the Evangelical "agenda" (abortion, prayer in the schools, censoring textbooks, etc.).

As for the dualisms in American life, the key concept is living with "Christian integrity" in the United States. Are we not in effect confronting the key dualism in modern Catholicism: (1) Integralism (see the later Jacques Maritain and other Catholic neo-conservatives who reject the spirit of Vatican II), and (2) an "open," "liberal" Catholicism, one among many voices, taking at least some of its cues from the culture at large—in short, a non-separatist church, and theological and philosophical pluralism.

In America, we see the breakdown of the liberal agenda of the civil rights days. Much of the church's attention is absorbed by problems in reproductive biology and bio-medical ethics: abortion, contraception, euthanasia, infanticide, suicide, genetic engineering, etc. The result is that the Catholic Church, though liberal on social issues generally (around the globe), is perceived as being in a strangely antagonistic position vis-à-vis women, abortion, feminism, etc.—and therefore no longer "mainstream" in the current social agenda.
We should probably be more explicit on one issue: the breakup of the liberal agenda of the civil-rights days, and the resulting schizophrenia of the "liberal" educated Catholic. To what extent are liberal Catholics, in the current breakdown of the Democratic Party, taking their cues on political, social, and moral issues from the Catholic hierarchy—e.g., in the Charles Curran case, where Curran probably articulates a moderate consensus of actual informed Catholics on these issues?

Another question: to what extent does the American Catholic Church in fact operated on two levels: 1) juridic, speaking authoritatively on the Curran or Hunthausen cases, and 2) prophetic, responsive to the promptings of grace and the Spirit—and this latter seems to be the level to which David O'Brien is appealing.

One has the impression that the church has in recent years reached a "bottom line," long predicted, below which it cannot allow itself to move, if it is to maintain its own claims and self-definition. I suspect it is more or less "stuck" permanently in its presently divided position (liberal on social justice, reactionary on women and sexuality) and that its effectiveness in the general culture is to that extent permanently injured.

I confess I miss any reference to American Evangelicals; they are, after all, very "public" but also almost entirely "resistant" to the culture. If they are "irresponsible," in what sense is this true? Because they do not properly "cooperate" with the liberal pressure groups? Official Catholicism, schizophrenically, alternately aligns itself with two kinds of pressure groups: (1) the reactionary (anti-abortion, anti-contraception, anti-pornography, for taxbreaks for churches and church schools, even prayer in the public schools), and (2) the "liberal" (aid for the poor and underprivileged, that is, those left out of the selective prosperity of the eighties). If birds of a feather, etc., it is hard to know what kind of rare bird American Catholicism now is—let's call it a "chameleon" bird.

"Civil religion," as I understand it (and as I think the historians of American culture understand it), has no "principles" of any sort, ones that would lead to such awkward divisions of allegiance to any national consensus on various public policy issues.
I wish David O'Brien had given some attention to certain Catholic "missing persons" here: first, the teachers, like Father Curran and Archbishop Hunthausen, and then, "political" Catholics, educated and independent political figures like Mario Cuomo and Geraldine Ferraro, who do not speak as "Catholics" in the public forum.

The "loyal" Catholic (loyal to what, exactly? the Bishops are loyal, but in a more special sense) has a decision to make in each case, about his relation—"if any"—to the teaching church. Is there, in fact, a "bottom line," a threshold, for Catholic belief today, that is, in actual practice?

David O'Brien's strongest statement is that Catholics have no "social gospel" (that does seem exaggerated) because of a divorce of social ethics from eschatology. This is a very rich notion and central to O'Brien's paper, but the divorce and the consequences are never really explicaded. The criterion of "love for the world" is moving for a moment, but it also sticks in one's throat, so diminished are our larger social hopes, and so debased is the commercial language of "love" in our times. The loss of hopefulness that David O'Brien detects in the Bishops' pastoral letters is this simply the reflections, on the Bishops' part, of the mood of this decade, a 'pessimistic' time? Will they feel better when 'things' get better? Public philosophy without public theology, O'Brien's theme: can the latter be invoked, frontally, in so pluralist a society as ours?

There are hopeful signs to be discerned: for example, the large outpouring of sympathy and support for Archbishop Hunthausen is a sign of lay conviction and sentiment, and a sign that the Catholic "remnant" are not simply reactionary or inert; they seem to know the kind of pastoral authority they want and will put up with. And so the hopeful vision articulated by David O'Brien is tonic; but can the two linked realities work in tandem, and in the same direction? That is, the "democratization of mind" that David O'Brien refers to is probably also a concomitant of the widespread (and still in some ways mysterious) process of secularization that has been pervasive in the past two centuries—a joint process that is (as I see it) irreversible. If that is so, O'Brien's appeal to "the reality of
voluntarism, the evangelical imperatives, and the reliance on popular support" is, to my mind, quite suppositious. The signs of the times are neither clear nor strong in that direction—though naturally I hope I am wrong. My doubts come partly because David O'Brien's notion of "the educated middle class" remains a puzzle to me; it seems all too likely to form a complacent middle-class church, quite like the bulk of the middle-class adherents of mainstream protestantism.

The call to "love" (and a strange putting-down of "justice") do challenge us. Are we to assume that the socialist—the leftist appealing to liberty, fraternity, equality—appeals to an objectionably limited ideal of "justice," while an oddly unlabeled and apolitical "Christian" appeals to an order of "love"? I do have my doubts. Law is imperfect, and there is no final "justice" or righting of wrongs in this life; but it is a reasonable stable basis of values for the only city I have experience of, the messy dangerous, human city—in short, a place a lot like Philadelphia. To shift the brutal Stalinist slogan: I am unregenerate enough to feel, when someone brings "love" into the "civil" conversation and implies that love simply supersedes justice, that I should reach for my revolver.

The final notion of the Bishops "summoning" the Catholic community to discuss issues, and their acting as "spokespersons" for (presumably) the consensus gained, is attractive but (to me) quite unrealistic. As I say, so far into the future as we can see, the "bottom line" has been firmly set. What is of long-range importance, and very ominous, is that fact that on virtually all the major issues in Europe and North America (the churches this Pope does not understand) the church continues to "teach" (on political, social, and moral issues) while the Catholic body, including the laity, is permanently split on the issues (sometimes publicly): for example, contraception, abortion, clerical celibacy, the ordination of women.

What this situation means for the long-range "teaching" function of the church in Western countries, seems to me obvious. The process is irreversible: individuals either drift away from the church altogether, or those inside pick and choose their own variety of Catholicism and Catholic issues (what has been called "boutique" Catholicism). In short, the impediments to O'Brien's attractive
model of interaction between hierarchy and laity (and mutual respect for the “roles” of each) grow steadily stronger—because of the whole drift of this society toward ever greater fragmentation and indeed the breakdown of even the civil religion. 

I do not deny that those who retain any Catholic identification do not make up their minds, or act, without any reference to Catholic “teaching”—even when they disagree. If the church is no longer peering over their shoulder, it is certainly present, even if more on the periphery of vision. It is, in short, a stand-off, and while I like and welcome David O’Brien’s attempt to exercise hope, I believe the stand-off will inevitably drift toward a rigid and doctrinaire church (and a smaller, submissive laity) on the one side, and many “lost” or indifferent quasi-Catholics, on the other, without a very clear spiritual center informing the roles they play in the public arena. This is, alas, a situation leading to a kind of built-in “bad faith,” or uneasy rebelliousness, or finally apathy and retreat from engagement. And one senses that this is the situation of many already in the 1980s.

If the norm is “care for the world,” it seems evident that Catholics, in the world, will defer the Catholic teaching that enhances the norm of “caring,” and simply ignore it where it does not—and that is what I think an unprecedented situation in the history of the church. The church is already, then, not the true initiator in the public sphere; whether it can become an effective, meaningful “convener,” as in the pastoral on hunger, remains to be seen.

And so I am moved here to be as clear-eyed and skeptical—I hope not cynical— as possible, while readily admitting the attraction of the new model of Christian “modesty” (which is of course not at all the tone of this Papacy). I wish I felt as encouraged as David O’Brien seems by the possibility of the mobilization of the educated middle class—that was a sixties ideal and phenomenon, much less in evidence in the more divided eighties. American middle-class Catholics, in the suburbs, drive BMWs and vote for Ronald Reagan. They are not less responsive to social needs that their neighbors are, thank goodness, but I see all the realities of the eighties working against very direct involvement in the public process.
In the very act of writing these depressing words, I saw a clip of *The Mission*, the film set in the Jesuit settlements in Paraguay in the seventeenth century. It is a tragic, if also melodramatic confrontation: hope, idealism, and the loving, caring community, over against the brutal realities of power and violence. I cannot decide whether the tears that welled up unbidden were tears of joy at the profoundly appealing and quite "eschatological" vision of love, in action, or tears of frustration and of hope indefinitely deferred. Thus no doubt has it always been: David O'Brien reminds us that we *must*, always, actively seek out the signs of hope in the culture, and actively cooperate with them. His words come, not a moment too soon.
II. J. Bryan Hehir

Well, let me begin by saying that I appreciate the chance to be a part of the Boardman Lecture Program, and particularly to be able to respond to David O'Brien. Some of you may have heard Dave O'Brien or read his material for the first time in connection with this lecture. This is not the case with me. We have been involved in a long conversation. And that long conversation, if he was able to read the sections of his larger paper this afternoon that I hope he read, demonstrates that he is an example of what he wants the bishops to call people to be; that is to say, a layperson engaged with the life of the church who has made a very specific professional contribution to the vision by which the church tries to live. O'Brien has been a strong supporter and also at times a strong critic of what the bishops have been doing in the last decade. Since it has been my fate to be situated somewhat near the bishops of that last decade, I have felt the support, and I've also known the critique. And the paper is a continuation of the conversation we've had. So I'm going to comment directly on three major themes.

I must say the paper presents a commentator with the kind of situation you find at a good restaurant where, at the end of the meal, they bring the dessert, they give you one fork and one small plate, and then they present you with a cart and tell you to pick one thing and nothing else. Well, the fifteen minutes imposes the same kind of discipline.

Therefore let me summarize what I intend to do. I will pick out three points and then I'll try to respond to them. I think he says the following: I think he says the pastoral letters, namely the pastoral on nuclear war and the pastoral on the economy, focus too much on public philosophy—read there Natural Law—and so they lack a constructive vision. Secondly, they focus too much on the church, and therefore they ignore the world. And thirdly, they focus too much on clerical questions, and therefore they ignore the lay potential and the lay person's problems in trying to live out the constructive social vision. I'll try and comment on those three
points. What I find is an ascending order of agreement. That is to say, we will disagree most on the first point, and we will agree most on the third point. And what I will try and offer is an explanation that almost inevitably will end up being an apologia, because I have been too close to what O'Brien writes about to be transcendental of the points that he makes. I can't very well claim distance from what he has criticized.

First, the letters are too much a public philosophy and not sufficiently a constructive and, indeed, constructive theological vision. I take the following comments from pages seventeen to eighteen of O'Brien's paper: "Public philosophy then can usefully create space for public discussion of the morality of specific policy choices. It cannot transcend those choices, or provide guidance to those who believe that the minimum of morality requires the liberation of people... public philosophy without public theology provides ethics not meaning and therefore it seems inadequate for the time in which we live." Now this critique of the bishops using an approach called public philosophy is explicitly a critique of John Courtney Murray's work. And so, I will try and respond to what I think is the value of use of a public philosophy as a way for a religious community to contribute to the political dialogue in a pluralistic society.

My sense today about the background theme of O'Brien's paper, namely the relationship of religion and politics, is that we face a situation in which this old question of religion and politics has taken on a new edge. There is almost not a week that goes by that one does not find on the Op-Ed page a commentary on the relationship of religion and politics, what it is coming to be, and on the other hand what it should be. There are several arguments about why religion and politics has taken on a new edge in the United States. Some people focus on new organizations, commonly called the Christian Right. Others focus on new individuals as being the catalyzing focus of religion and politics, and whether your individual is Jesse Jackson, or Jerry Falwell, or John O'Connor, the argument is that these individuals have forced the religion and politics argument to a new level of intensity and visibility. My view is that neither new organizations nor new individuals explain the
edge that is there on religion and politics today.

In my own view the edge is provided by a third term. What creates the intersection of religion and politics today is the emergence with new power, it seems to me, of the moral question in the public policy debate. On a whole series of issues from medical issues to military issues, there is, it seems to me, a centrality about the moral factor in the public policy debate today. Increasingly, I would argue, it is difficult to make good policy, meaning by that effective, successful, efficient policy. It is difficult to make good policy unless one can get some consensus about what constitutes right policy. And I think we have examples of what happens when there is no moral consensus: it tends to paralyze the political process. That clearly has happened again and again in the last ten years on the abortion question, which O'Brien deals with. The lack of any moral consensus on that question can literally paralyze the U.S. Congress.

As someone whose job it is to work with them I continually come up against the experience—we didn't have it this year, but we have had it several times—of an October deadline, when the Congress wants to go home, and you have funding bills that really are supposed to fund the heat and lights of the Commerce Department or the State Department, and you have abortion riders tagged to these bills. And somebody would say why would anyone do it. People do it because we are reduced to almost guerrilla warfare because we lack any moral consensus about where to go with that issue. Similarly, if you look at something as different as the SDI, the SDI in the president's mind is being sold as a superior moral program. If you listen to the president's description of SDI, he does not try to sell on the technological issues. He is immensely, serenely ignorant of the technological issues but he feels he has a superior moral answer to the nuclear age and the SDI, and therefore anyone who is going to criticize the SDI better have a moral response to the president's moral case. My only point is I think the intersection of religion and politics is today focused on the moral question.

It is the emergence of the moral factor in the public debate, that in a sense calls the religious communities into the wider public
debate as one group among many to comment on the moral issue. It is in that context that I would plead the strength of a public philosophy. I think O'Brien is exactly right that its role is that it usefully creates space for public discussion of the morality of specific policy choices. And it is precisely that, it is precisely for that reason, that I think a religious community seeking to contribute to the public debate best resort to precisely some kind of moral vision that can contribute to the argument that you need a moral consensus if you are going to effectively move policy on a range of issues from genetics through nuclear weapons. Now here I think Murray was right. Murray argued that without some moral consensus, over the long term, a pluralistic democracy risked spinning off into a series of sectarian visions that might provide the framework for individual choices but would not provide guidance and foundation for public policy.

I think that the nature of the issues we confront today, even more sharply than in Murray's time, highlights the fact that if you can't get at least minimal moral consensus on some moral issues, you can paralyze the political process. Now it is true that public philosophy does not provide, very often, a constructive, grand vision, a kind of horizon toward which we can move. Theological language, biblical language is is more useful in that way. If you listen to Martin Luther King, he provides a vision towards which you move. I think O'Brien is right that we need that kind of vision; but we don't need it at the price of sacrificing a sort of specific argument the moral choices and the empirical choices we face that public philosophy provides. So I think he's right about the need for a vision. I just think its a different task, and I would be all for someone fulfilling the task, but not at the price of sacrificing the political philosophy, the public philosophy that I think is needed.

Secondly, the argument is that what the bishops have done is too ecclesial, too church-centered and not sufficiently world centered. Here is there more agreement between O'Brien and myself than there was on the first question. And to use an assertion of the paper, on page twenty-two he argues "I would suggest that the public world is at least as adequate an object of theological reflection as is the church." I am entirely in agreement with that
question. I think I can explain why there is a certain church focus through what the bishops have done over the last ten years, and I would point to two things. First of all, there is the legacy of the Second Vatican Council that O'Brien refers to several times. It was an ecclesiological council. The primary content of the Second Vatican Council was the church, and to some degree the logic of the post-conciliar reflection tended to be ecclesial. Secondly, one of the dimensions of that ecclesial reflection coming from the Councils, that O'Brien endorses, is precisely the church's role in the world. And so while I would fully agree that a world-centered theology needs to complement the vision of the church, I think it is understandable why in the last ten to fifteen years, the focus has been on the church.

Twenty-five to thirty years ago if you took the nuclear pastoral on the floor of the bishops meeting, it would have been read off the floor as not being appropriate for their activity. So there has been an ecclesial consensus that is being slowly built among the bishops. That is not why they share in the life of the church. If you preach on these issues, as I have tried to do, you do not get questions that engage your preaching on whether you are right on this conclusion or that conclusion. The general question is why in the world are these issues being brought into the life of the church with such aggressiveness. So the church-centered focus of these letter, to some degree, is an attempt to build an ecclesial consensus and then to carry from it on into the question that O'Brien calls us to. I agree fully with the call. I think it is understandable why the focus has been on the church.

Lastly, the question that the letters in a sense are too clerically cast. He does not say this, but I think the main point is that the letters have not engaged constructively a lay role, and a lay voice, and given constructive direction for lay participation where people feel equally at home in the church and in the world, and indeed know that when they are in the world they are still very much part of the church. I agree that the Achilles' heel of the church's social ministry is precisely this question that Catholicism has had a problem for a long time with the lay vocation. And I think it has not been well dealt with. I think the pastoral sections of both
of the pastorals are the weakest sections. Partly that's a function of the fact that they come at the end of the writing of the letters and we had run out of time. I can only plead that kind of pragmatism. Certainly with the nuclear letter, it was attached at the very end without much consideration given to it. I don't think that necessarily means that's the way it's valued, but they are the weakest substantive part of the letter.

And so I fully agree that while the engagement of the bishops in the social arena has attracted a lot of attention to the bishops, it has not necessarily provided focused direction and engagement for the wider church, and that is a fatal flaw. How can one do that? I think that there is this question that O'Brien raises about the question of meaning. What the meaning of the engagement of the world is for the life of the whole church. And we are still far away from providing a satisfactory answer to that. There are other questions involved in this part of O'Brien's critiques about how the bishops should function as teachers or not as teachers, and how they correlate their words and their deeds as a kind of symbol of what they expect the church to be. There are questions of how the bishops correlate their words and their deeds, whether there is consistency there or not. But I really haven't got time to address that. I would fully agree that the letters are cast in terms of the bishops' role, and they are the bishops' voice, and they have yet to engage the life of the whole church as adequately as they should in a constructive vision.
III. Rodger Van Allen

I am grateful to the Committee on the George Dana Boardman Lectureship for giving me the opportunity to participate with you this evening in the discussion of Professor O'Brien's presentation on "Public Theology, Civil Religion and American Catholicism." For some years, the writings of Professor O'Brien have been immensely helpful to me as they have been also to many others. The chance to dialogue with him and with my distinguished colleagues on the panel is therefore especially welcome. That we meet and speak at the University of Pennsylvania adds to my pleasure. This is the first opportunity I have had to speak here. My father was a 1928 graduate of this University and this in my own family history this is something of a symbolic occasion.

Professor O'Brien has admirably extended some of the themes addressed by Professor Harvey Cox in his 1984 Boardman Lecture on "Religion and Politics in America: the Prospects for Civility." The civility Professor Cox spoke of was not that of a coolly detached withdrawal from life, but that of a commitment to the duties, obligations and rights of citizenship. Religion, Cox maintained, far from being a nuisance in this process of restoring civility, should rather be regarded as a rich source of renewal and empowerment. Professor Cox was encouraged in his viewpoint by a June 1984 conference at Harvard University, co-sponsored by the Divinity School and the Institute for Politics of the Kennedy School of Government. He states: "We invited people from across the political spectrum: men, women, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, conservatives, people from the Jesse Jackson campaign, people from the Moral Majority. We spent two days together. Nobody killed anyone else. People did listen to each other."

In his paper, Professor O'Brien takes up "a few of the problems of Catholicism and American public life." He tells us of life "out in the trenches" with Catholic politicians such as Mario Cuomo and Geraldine Ferraro, or Henry Hyde, of Catholic prelates and their varying styles of leadership, of John Courtney Murray, civility, and
the intellectual foundations of public theology. The variegated landscape of fifty million Catholics and their fellow Americans addressing issues of nuclear arms, the economy, abortion or other issues is not like a two-day conference at Harvard, but it is fundamentally encouraging to Professor O'Brien who concludes with an invitation to us to "arise and open our eyes to the bright future that is before us."

In my own contribution this evening, I want to share three concerns that touch on dimensions of Professor O'Brien's paper and that provide both problems and possibilities. These concerns are (1) the historical intersections of the Catholic community in the U.S.; (2) the relationship between internal and participatory church structures and external witness and leadership; and (3) the importance of the theology of work as an avenue of approach to the integration of religion and life.

First, the historical intersection. My own broad periodization of the experience of the Catholic community in the United States sees a movement that has gone through four stages. I use the phrase "from aristocratic origins" to characterize the period from 1776 to 1815, the death of the first Catholic bishop, John Carroll. The second phase, the "immigrant Catholic coming of age period" begins not long after Bishop Carroll's death in 1815 and continues essentially until 1960. The key event in the transition from an immigrant Catholic coming of age period to the third phase, the "maturity and identity crisis" phase is the candidacy and election of John F. Kennedy as the first Catholic president of the United States. Catholics very quickly went from a suspect and second class status in the society to a full and matured partnership. The heady atmosphere of the early 1960s, however, with the Peace Corps, Vatican II and Pope John XXIII, gave way in the later 1960s to an increasing realization of the meaning of the war in Vietnam, and a dismay at the repeated condemnation of contraception in the 1968 encyclical Humanae Vitae. Catholics had long known that neither their government nor their church was perfect, but many were not prepared for the scope of the blunders they felt that Vietnam and Humanae Vitae represented. These twin traumas contributed heavily to the identity crisis aspect of this "maturity and identity
crisis" phase of the experience of Catholics in the U.S. I call the fourth phase the "emergent creative inculturation" phase. This is the phase that interests Professor O'Brien in his presentation. In this phase, a matured Catholicism within the U.S. attempts to build on the positive features and values in the society while questioning, challenging and confronting features that are seen to be wrong. In 1971, the U.S. Catholic bishops applied the tests of the just-war doctrine to the Vietnam War, and concluded that it failed the test of proportionality, i.e., was clearly producing more evil than good. This was one marker in this creative inculturation phase. Resisting the rush toward a more or less routine acceptance of abortion was another marker, though there is indeed more to discuss on this issue. The most striking events, however, are the peace pastoral of 1983 and the economics pastoral that is now emerging. Two years ago in commenting on the peace pastoral, Professor Cox noted "the remarkable change and maturation taking place among American Roman Catholic bishops." Cox stated:

I would argue that their way of introducing their moral and religious perspectives into a very important public policy debate, namely the debate about nuclear weapons, is almost a model of how this can be most felicitously and constructively done. They not only issued a pastoral letter about nuclear weapons, they even let us watch over their shoulders as they were drafting it and sent it out in its rough form for discussion and response. They addressed it not only to Catholics but to all people of good will, all people who could follow a rational argument. They did not say "thus saith the Lord." They said, "here is our contribution to a very important issue drawn from our tradition. We invite others into this discussion."

The peace pastoral and the economics pastoral are fundamental markers in this creative inculturation phase of Catholicism in the U.S. and they form much of the focus of Professor O'Brien's paper. Is there not, however, an historical intersection of this creative inculturation phase? I refer to the movement from the *aggiornamento* Catholicism of Pope John XXIII to the restoration Catholicism emerging under Pope John Paul II. One cartoonist has depicted this as a movement from the open windows of Pope John XXIII to the closed and darkened windows of Pope John Paul II. Is
this correct? Evidence of an older authoritarianism seems evident in the recent handling of Father Curran of Catholic University, of Father Sweeney and the efforts to suppress his survey on clerical celibacy, and in the coerced recantations of Catholic sisters in the New York Times abortion ad controversy. Other examples could be cited. How far removed this seems from the teaching and leadership style of the peace pastoral so praised by Professor Cox. My fundamental question, therefore, for Professor O’Brien concerns whether the description of this historical intersection is accurate, and if so, what will be the consequences of this meeting? Will Restoration untrack creative inculturation?

My second observation concerns the relationship between the openness of internal participatory church structures and external witness and leadership. Delores Leaky, executive director of the Bishops’ Secretariat for the Laity has said: “My personal view is that the issue of participation is on the continuum from the center of the church to beyond, into the heart of societal structures. In other words, there is a correlation between the extent and quality of lay participation within the church and the motivation of the laity to engage in responsible Christian action in the world.” Is Delores Leaky correct and if so, does this not indicate an important consideration for those such as Professor O’Brien who seek the full impact of the process that has produced the peace and economics pastoral?

My third observation is to regret, as Professor O’Brien does, the apparent shrinking of the holiness in daily life theme in the economics pastoral. To reduce three paragraphs on the lay vocation to two sentences seems puzzling. It seems especially curious when in my opinion perhaps the most creative element in the leadership of Pope John Paul II has been in his encyclical letter Laborem Exercens and in its emphasis on a theology of work. The genuine integration of religion and life which is at the heart of the concept of the Boardman Lecture can hardly be achieved without a theology of work and yet this suffers neglect at the hands of both Protestants and Catholics. It may be useful to reflect on this.
Notes


2 It is the church's role to identify the moral elements in the way government formulated solutions to the problems facing it; I would suggest it is not the church's task to develop specific legislation". Archbishop John Roach, "The Public Policy Task of the Church," Origins, September 30, 1981, p. 179. This position is incorporated into political responsibility statements published by the hierarchy during each of the last four national elections. During the last election the NCCB President, James Malone, stated most directly the church's opposition to Governor Cuomo's distinction between his private moral views and his responsibilities as a public official in "Religion and the 1984 Campaign," Origins, August 23, 1984, pp. 161-163 and he summarized the bishops' position in "The Intersection of Public Opinion and Public Policy" in Origins, November 29, 1984. Cardinal Bernadin's views, "The Seamless Garment," were summed up in several speeches and published in pamphlet form by the National Catholic Reporter in 1984.


5 “Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy,” first draft.


7 Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, 1978).


10 John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (New York, 1960).


John Courtney Murray, We Hold These Truths, p. 12. Not only did self-government depend upon the "inherited intuitive wisdom" of the people but it depended as well on "a great act of faith in the capacity of the people to govern themselves." Who makes that act of faith? What is the alternative? Even that depended upon the distinction between state and society, the vigor of voluntary associations, and thus presumably on limitations on state power which makes such associational activities significant, and broad acceptance as norms of personal behavior or "the universal moral values upon whose shared possession the self-discipline of a free society depends." Murray was most Catholic in hinting that such shared possession was, in fact, endangered. But, like his Catholic contemporaries, he offered no suggestion other than a renewed act of faith, indicative of comfortable ambassadorship from a secure self-culture which, in fact, felt little urgency about the perceived moral and intellectual deterioration supposedly taking place around it. See pages 36-37 for the above quotes. On the role of natural law certainty, perceived cultural declension in the modern world, and the uses of such ideas, see William Halsey, The Survival of American Innocence (Notre Dame, 1980).

Mario M. Cuomo, "Religious Beliefs and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor's Perspective," as circulated by the University of Notre Dame, September 13, 1984; Michael Novak.


24. See my "Theology in the North American Context: The U.S. Story" for the beginnings of this historical argument, on the erosion of the subculture see me The Renewal of American Catholicism (New York, 1972).


27. John Coleman, "The Future of Ministry," America, March 28, 1981. The many articles written in preparation for last fall's extraordinary Synod almost all described the Americanization of the Catholic church in the last generation as problematic, risking the church's identity and integrity. In one way or another, both left and right prescribe solutions aimed at separating the church from the world around it, even in the process of social engagement. See, for example, Gregory Baum, "After Liberal Optimism: What?" Commonweal, June 21, 1985, pp. 368-370.
Compare the first draft, paragraphs 326-330, with the third draft, paragraphs 323, 328-332 and 344.

Bryan Hehir, National Cathedral Speech; see also a lovely address by Bishop Kenneth Untener, noting the newness of the Vatican II vision of the church in the world: "The Differing Visions of Camelot and the Magnificat," Origins, August 23, 1986.


John Courtney Murray, We Hold These Truths, p. 297.


David Hollenbach, "Towards a Fundamental Political Theology Symposium," 711-713. Hollenbach, the major drafter of the economic pastoral, defines public philosophy as the "effort to discover and communicate the socially significant meanings of common social and political experience in a pluralistic society."
The dialogue between the two, he suggests, is the work of "fundamental political theology." He makes this comment in a symposium on "John Courtney Murray's Unfinished Agendas"; in the same symposium cited above, including John Coleman's hesitant defense of civil religion, Robin Levin's call for a theology of participation, and Bryan Hehir's strong defense of public philosophy of the Murray variety.


37 Olafson, "Two Views" uses the image of public loyalty "squeezed flat."


39 Kenneth Untener, "Camelot and Magnificat."

40 H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America, xii, xvi.
