

## CURRENT THEOLOGY

### THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY IN PUBLIC: A SYMPOSIUM ON JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY'S UNFINISHED AGENDA

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During the past several years a number of essays re-examining the social thought of John Courtney Murray have been published by American theologians. Several of these essays have appeared in this journal.<sup>1</sup> Murray's acknowledged stature as one of the most original thinkers produced by the Catholic community in the United States makes his work an indispensable resource for an American Catholic social ethics. His masterful achievement was to have brought the great tradition of Catholic thought on the interrelation of Church, state, and society into creative dialogue with the "American proposition" of pluralist democracy. This achievement stands as a permanent foundation for the ongoing Catholic response to the unique problems and challenges of American society. In this symposium the contributors seek to build on this foundation by re-examining one of Murray's central methodological convictions: that the Church's contribution to public ethical discourse in America will be most responsible and persuasive if it is formulated in the categories of philosophical reason rather than expressed in the symbols of religious belief. The symposium is an effort to clarify the links between the Church's contribution to an American public philosophy and the public impact of the Church's own theological convictions.

The relation between philosophical approaches to social ethics and efforts to address social issues in an explicitly theological way has emerged as one of the central issues in recent discussions of Murray's writings. In part this is due to the heightened awareness of the political dimensions of the whole theological enterprise which political and liberation theo-

<sup>1</sup> Recent writings on Murray by participants in this symposium are the following: John A. Coleman, S.J., "Vision and Praxis in American Theology: Orestes Brownson, John A. Ryan, and John Courtney Murray," *TS* 37 (1976) 3-40; J. Bryan Hehir, "Issues in Church and State: A Catholic Perspective," in Claude U. Broach, ed., *Issues in Church and State: Proceedings of a Dialogue between Catholics and Baptists* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Ecumenical Institute, 1976) 81-95; id., "Church and State: Basic Concepts," *Origins* 9 (1978) 337 ff.; Robin W. Lovin, "The Constitution as Covenant: The Moral Foundations of Democracy and the Practice of Desegregation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1978); David Hollenbach, S.J., "Public Theology in America: Some Questions for Catholicism after John Courtney Murray," *TS* 37 (1976) 290-303. See also Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., ed., *Religious Liberty, 1965 & 1975: A Symposium on a Historic Document* (New York: Paulist, 1976); Donald E. Pelotte, S.S.S., *John Courtney Murray: Theologian in Conflict* (New York: Paulist, 1976).

gies have stimulated. It is also a result of the increased understanding of the social power of religious symbols and beliefs. The potential effects, for good and for ill, of the way this power has operated in the past have been the subject of historical and sociological studies of American "civil religion."<sup>2</sup> Both of these developments have occurred since Murray's death, and both raise questions about the adequacy and the sufficiency of his method in the contemporary context. Similarly, questions have been raised about Murray's optimistic judgment on the fundamental compatibility of the Christian vision of a just society with the accepted principles which govern public moral discourse about social policy in the United States. The need for a theory of justice and human rights which acknowledges the simultaneous existence of deepening communal interdependence and heightened social conflict is increasingly evident. Murray brilliantly addressed the issues of religious freedom and religious group conflict by appealing for a recovery and renewal of reasoned public discourse about the meaning of human dignity and freedom in the religious sphere. Whether such an approach underestimates the potential contribution which explicitly Christian theological discourse can make to a comprehensive understanding of justice and human rights is a central question addressed by this symposium.

In the contributions which follow, both John A. Coleman, S.J., of the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley and Robin W. Lovin of the University of Chicago Divinity School suggest that Murray's efforts to renew the American public philosophy can and should be supplemented by a public discourse which explicitly appeals to Christian religious symbolism. J. Bryan Hehir, Associate Secretary for International Justice and Peace at the United States Catholic Conference, reaffirms the perennial need for sophisticated philosophical analysis if the Christian community is to have an effective impact on public policy. Hehir calls for a reappropriation of Murray's method as not only adequate but as indispensable in the contemporary situation. He stresses the need for a renewed public philosophy if both America and the American Church are to move intelligently toward greater justice in a world marked by deep pluralism of ultimate beliefs. The symposium concludes with some brief suggestions by the editor about future directions for American Catholic social thought—both philosophical and theological.

#### A POSSIBLE ROLE FOR BIBLICAL RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE

Three very different strands of tradition have contributed to America's public self-understanding: republican theory, biblical religion, and the

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, eds., *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), and John Murray Cuddihy, *No Offense: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste* (New York: Seabury, 1978).

public philosophy of Enlightenment liberalism. None has existed in pure form without some intermingling with another.

Thus, Henry May has recently argued that the liberal public philosophy—appealing both to Enlightenment concepts of individual autonomy and liberation and to utilitarian notions of enlightened self-interest—lacked, in the American case, the distinctive antireligious and anti-Christian animus characteristic of European Enlightenment thought.<sup>3</sup> In America, religion and the Enlightenment mingled freely. Robert Bellah speaks of an uneasy American amalgam of biblical thought and utilitarianism.<sup>4</sup> Even the recent revival of political philosophy in the United States contains, albeit in a pale form, residues of the Christian religious impulse. This is evident, for example, in the special concern for the least advantaged in John Rawls's theory of justice.<sup>5</sup>

A careful untangling of the alliances and admixtures among these three elements of the American tradition of self-understanding is beyond my intentions in these remarks. My purpose is to point out the relative lack in American Catholic social thought, until recent times, of appeals to biblical imagery in discussions of the normative foundations of public life. I also want to suggest that this lacuna skews Murray's writings on public issues too strongly in the direction of liberal individualism, despite his own intentions.

Early American republican theory, especially as contained in *The Federalist Papers*, relied heavily on the Roman ideal of constitutionalism and the constitutionally mixed state with its system of checks and balances. Cicero gave the classic and eloquent defense of this theory in his *On the Commonwealth*.<sup>6</sup> Both Madison and Jefferson were steeped in Roman republican thought and imagery, with its emphasis on republican virtue, Stoic discipline, and love of the common good as the cornerstone of a sound commonwealth. It was not by chance that so many Roman names and forms can be found in early American constitutional thinking. The thought of Montesquieu also served as a more contemporary link to the tradition of republican virtue for the Founders of the nation. Both the tradition of republican theory and that of biblical religion place great stress on love and sacrifice for the common good and on the need to found the health of public life on individual virtue and a morally good citizenry. Both stand in judgment of social theories which expect public virtue to arise from a healthy compromise of private vices.

Whatever the historic importance of the tradition of republican theory,

<sup>3</sup> Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* (New York: Seabury, 1976) xiii and passim.

<sup>5</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, eds. George Sabine and Stanley Smith (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976).

it seems to have lost its force in late-twentieth-century public discourse. It may be possible to retrieve its powerful imagery, although it is so rooted in the ideal of widespread dispersal of property, relative equality of wealth, simplicity of living, and the absence of economic centralization that it seems unlikely that it can function appropriately as an ideal for the large-scale, centralized capitalist economy which has come to predominate in America.

The tradition of biblical religion is arguably the most powerful and pervasive symbolic resource for understanding America. Rooted in Puritan covenant theology, it insisted that God will favor our undertakings only if we keep His commandments. The covenant image undercuts facile individualisms and a superficial gospel of wealth and success. Though often used in a jingoistic fashion to support American imperialistic expansion, biblical religion in America contains the seeds for a critical sense of American purpose. Its most authentic voices never forgot that God's gracious benevolence on the land was conditioned by righteous living and charity toward the disinherited of the earth.

It remains an empirical question whether this tradition of socially conscious Christianity is still, in any sense, vigorous among the populace. Nevertheless, its vigor seems, on the face of it, more obvious than that of the other two traditions of American self-understanding. Few even mouth the language of republican virtue any more, even as a rhetoric.

Public philosophy has been a vigorous strand of American thought, extending from the Scottish common-sense philosophy which so influenced Jefferson through John Dewey, Horace Kallen, and Walter Lippmann. Despite a recent revival in the so-called Harvard school, however, it presently seems a rather tenuous force in American public life.<sup>7</sup> The liberal tradition of American public philosophy took for granted the possibility of continual geographic and economic expansion. These presuppositions allowed it to defray the question of justice by focusing on liberty, in the fragile assumption that the pursuit of liberty would automatically guarantee an equitable distribution of goods and opportunities. The myth of a pre-established harmony or an invisible hand dies hard. W. Carey McWilliams has argued that though American public thought is very strong in its emphasis on liberty and equality, it contains only weak symbolic resources to relate to *fraternity* or solidarity.<sup>8</sup>

It is likely that some new retrieval and admixture of all three traditions

<sup>7</sup> Garry Wills, *Inventing America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978). Wills argues for the influence of the Scottish common-sense philosophy on Jefferson. The Harvard school of public philosophy includes, besides Rawls, Michael Walzer, Christopher Jencks, Barrington Moore, and Robert Nozick.

<sup>8</sup> W. Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973). I have retained the sexist word "fraternity" because of its classic place in the trilogy of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

is necessary to address the question of American identity and public purpose in our time. American Catholic social thought in general and Murray in particular appealed generously to the American liberal tradition of public philosophy and the classic understanding of republican virtue embedded in the medieval synthesis. Curiously, however, they were very sparing in invoking biblical religion and the prophetic tradition in their efforts to address issues of public policy.

There are two reasons for this Catholic reluctance to evoke biblical imagery in public discourse. Much of the public religious rhetoric for American self-understanding was couched in a particularist Protestant form which excluded a more generously pluralistic understanding of America. Perhaps one reason why American Catholics and Jews have never conceived of the American proposition as a covenant—even a broken one—was because Protestant covenant thought tended in practice to exclude the new immigrants. Hence, for American Catholics as for Jews, more “secular” Enlightenment forms and traditions promised inclusion and legitimacy in ways Protestant evangelical imagery foreclosed. As Murray states it, the Protestant identification with America led to “Nativism in all its manifold forms, ugly and refined, popular and academic, fanatic and liberal. The neo-Nativist as well as the paleo-Nativist addresses to the Catholic substantially the same charge: ‘You are among us but are not of us.’”<sup>9</sup>

Though for both Catholics and Jews the American proposition had religious implications, both groups invested it with far less religious significance than did American Protestants. Again, Murray’s way of putting the issue is symptomatic. For him, national consensus rested on a moral, not a religious, consent. “The distinctive bond of the civil multitude is reason, or more exactly, that exercise of reason which is argument.”<sup>10</sup> Murray’s claim was that Catholics better embodied the living tradition of natural law on which America was founded and that the American experience could teach a lesson to world Catholicism about the constitutional question of separation of Church and state. He made no religious claims for the founding act of America as such. Catholics, decidedly, were not here in force when the Puritans and their God made a covenant with the land. Nor were they ever conspicuously invited to join the covenant. They preferred, therefore, a less religious, more civil understanding of America.

The second reason for a Catholic predilection for the two traditions of republican theory and liberal philosophy is the Catholic recognition of the need for secular warrant for social claims in a pluralist society. This penchant is rooted in Catholic natural-law thought.

<sup>9</sup> John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960) 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

There are decided strengths and weaknesses to Murray's strategy of linking his public discourse uniquely with the tradition of republican theory and public philosophy. One strength is the pattern of providing rules for civil argument which, in principle, apply equally to Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and secularists. A second is the frank recognition of the extraordinary symbolic pluralism in American public life. As Murray put it, "we not only hold different views but have become different kinds of men as we have lived our several histories."<sup>11</sup> A recognition of pluralism avoids paper-thin consensus or dominative strategies which assume that one particularistic self-understanding of America is universally normative. It also reduces religious fanaticism in public life.

I would single out three weaknesses which seem to me to be linked with Murray's refusal to evoke biblical symbols for the American self-understanding. The first relates to the bias toward liberty at the expense of justice in the American public-philosophy tradition and its concomitant individualistic tone. While Murray tries to correct for this bias by explicit appeal to the tradition of classic republican theory, this latter tradition is presently such a tenuous force in American life that it does little to reorient our received liberalism in the direction of a vivid concern for the priority of the common good over individual interest.<sup>12</sup>

In his stress on liberty and the limited character of the state, Murray lends himself to misinterpretation as a simple restatement of the prevailing American liberal tradition which runs from Locke through Nozick. For example, in adopting Adolph Berle's benign interpretation of the American capitalistic enterprise, Murray did not raise important critical questions about the substantive justice of American economic arrangements.<sup>13</sup> Nor is his defense of America's cold-war stance particularly critical or enlightening.<sup>14</sup> I have been personally astonished by how many of my students, in reading Murray, are unable to see how he differs from American liberal thinkers or how he uses the tradition of republican virtue to correct the individualistic biases of liberal public philosophy. My tentative conclusion has been that the tradition of republican virtue is no longer a living part of the texture of American public discourse.

A second weakness in Murray's strategy for public discourse is his failure to admit that his own theory of natural law rests on particularistic Catholic theological principles and theories which do not command widespread allegiance. Were Murray to have made explicit the theological premises about revelation and reason, nature and grace, which ground his own understanding of natural law, it would turn out, I suspect, to be more theologically informed than he claimed. Moreover, this explicitation

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

<sup>12</sup> For Murray's appeal to the republican virtue tradition, see *ibid.* 22, 46-47.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 99-139.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 221-47.

could undercut claims for a neutral, objective ground for discourse in a pluralistic society. Clearly, to non-Catholic eyes, the natural law has often seemed more Catholic than natural.

The final weakness in Murray's strategy for public discourse lies in the nature of the symbols he uses. There is a sense in which "secular" language, especially when governed by the Enlightenment ideals of conceptual clarity and analytic rigor, is exceedingly "thin" as a symbol system. It is unable to evoke the rich, polyvalent power of religious symbolism, a power which can command commitments of emotional depth. The very necessity of seeking a universality which transcends our rootedness and loyalties to particular communities makes secular language chaste, sober, and thin. I wonder if a genuine sense of vivid *communitas*, in Victor Turner's sense of the term, is possible on the basis of a nonreligious symbol system.<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup>

Murray was always very pessimistic about the chances of reviving classic republican theory in the face of what he called the new barbarians at the gate. I strongly share his pessimism, especially if the strategy excludes explicit, if humble and tentative, appeal to the biblical self-understanding. The tradition of biblical religion seems the most potent symbolic resource we possess to address the sense of drift in American identity and purpose. That drift is even stronger today than it was a generation ago, when Murray first detected it.

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#### RESOURCES FOR A PUBLIC THEOLOGY

John Coleman distinguishes three legitimating ideologies in American public life: republican, biblical, and liberal. These systems of thought are certainly analytically distinct, but they are also historically intertwined.

<sup>15</sup> See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), for an understanding of thick symbols and their relation to a strong sense of community feeling.

<sup>16</sup> Jeff Weintraub of the sociology department, University of California, Berkeley, is currently preparing a work on the history of republican virtue.

Although our public discourse is usually "republican" or "liberal" in Coleman's sense of those terms, American republicanism and liberalism bear the stamp of their origins in a community that understood itself in biblical terms. The idea of a covenant people, bound together by a mutual commitment and accountable to God for the moral life of the whole community, retained a pervasive influence long after the biblical terminology disappeared from legal and legislative documents.<sup>17</sup>

The aspiration to be a community where moral values are lived, and not merely professed, dates at least from John Winthrop's *Model of Christian Charity* in 1630. Admonishing the Massachusetts Bay colonists, Governor Winthrop declared: "That which the most in their Churches mainteine as a truth in profession onely, we must bring into familiar and constant practice."<sup>18</sup> This sense of responsibility to order our common life by moral norms remains a political force that cannot be exhaustively explained by the republican idea of constitutionally limited government nor by the liberal theory of a social contract negotiated by democratic procedures. The twentieth-century history of the civil-rights movement demonstrates that moral aspiration with religious roots can still legitimate changes in constitutional doctrine and legal procedures. These changes are, of course, rarely explicated in terms of covenant community or biblical standards of righteousness; one reads at most a cautious reassertion of the place of natural law in American jurisprudence.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, a public theology that builds on the moral aspiration for a covenanted community clearly does not seek to impose alien or sectarian norms on our national life. Even within the rules of American public discourse, there is a place for theological affirmation of the movements and traditions that aspire to the covenantal ideal of a just community, and there is a place for political assertion of the legitimate influence these aspirations have on the formal procedural rules of government.

John Courtney Murray would not be surprised by the discovery of a theological foundation beneath the structures of our constitutional system, but he was reluctant to make that theology explicit or to press its claims against other legitimating ideas in our national life. The fundamental distinction between society and the state required, in his mind, a distinctive normative framework for the resolution of public issues. For example, theology might applaud *Brown v. Board of Education* on the basis of a moral truth: ". . . racial discrimination cannot be defended on moral grounds." A public decision for desegregation rests, however, on a

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1978).

<sup>18</sup> John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," in Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *Puritan Political Ideas: 1558-1794* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965) 90.

<sup>19</sup> Archibald Cox, *The Role of the Supreme Court in American Government* (New York: Oxford University, 1976) 110-12.



“sociological jurisprudence” which assesses the readiness of the people for the way of life that racial equality implies.<sup>20</sup>

Murray employed this distinction between the norms appropriate to theology and morals and the norms that guide the state primarily to reinforce his case for religious liberty. Sociological jurisprudence insists that there are effective limits on the power of the state to control the ways of life that have evolved among the people.<sup>21</sup> No prudent jurist or Church leader would try to impose by law an artificial unity on the pluralistic forms of religious life in the modern democracies. Religious liberty is therefore a counsel of prudence in Murray’s view. It is an “article of peace,” not an “article of faith.”<sup>22</sup>

As a theologian in that part of society which is the Church, Murray might address questions of religious liberty theologically. But as a churchman suggesting religious liberty as a policy for the state, he thought the language of jurisprudence was more appropriate. The question on Murray’s unfinished agenda is whether this distinction between jurisprudence and morality, between the norms of the state and the norms of society, can be extended to other human rights. Murray himself insisted that religious freedom should not be about some unique set of “religious” rights. A theory of religious freedom implies a complete theory of human rights.<sup>23</sup>

In this broader discussion of human-rights theory, the conceptual distinction between society and state, which is so important to religious liberty, must not obscure the actual interpenetration of society and state in contemporary life. In a technological society that approaches the conditions of a welfare state, the state is necessarily involved in implementing, as well as protecting, societal freedoms. Political freedom, for example, means little unless there is also access to education and information that make possible effective participation in political life. Protection for the home and family environment has little value unless the state also provides at least a minimal standard of resources to make the home a healthy environment for nurturing a personal sense of identity and responsibility.

Under present circumstances, therefore, the conceptual distinction between society and state cannot be carried into practice as a differentiation between normative systems. A rigid division of social life between subsidiary institutions, which are guided by moral norms, and the state,

<sup>20</sup> See esp. *We Hold These Truths* 145–46.

<sup>21</sup> Sociological jurisprudence remained an important part of Murray’s case for religious freedom, but it does not appear in his later writings on race relations.

<sup>22</sup> *We Hold These Truths* 56.

<sup>23</sup> See Murray’s introduction to the Declaration on Religious Freedom in *The Documents of Vatican II*, eds. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., and Joseph Gallagher (New York: Guild, 1966) 673–74.

which is guided by jurisprudence, does not accurately reflect the functional interpenetration of society and state nor the unavoidable impact of state policy on the moral possibilities open to persons in society.

A public theology adequate to the present situation must acknowledge this practical interpenetration of society and state. The Church can be an effective advocate for human rights only by insisting that persons are entitled not only to the freedom to pursue their private activities; they are entitled to participation in governmental processes that allocate resources that make these private activities possible and worth while. The Christian moral vision of a just society expressed in biblical symbols can be distinguished from the jurisprudential norms for public policy. But just as society and state are increasingly interpenetrating, so must the Christian vision be woven into the fabric of policy and jurisprudence. The effort to do this is the task of public theology. The Christian notion of society as a covenant community, based on participation and mutual accountability, has a crucial role to play in the success of a human-rights program for the next decade.

Murray's unfinished agenda, then, includes a rethinking of the distinction between society and state, and thus of the roles of the Church and the theologian in the social-political sphere. As Murray himself always recognized, this will require changes in thinking both in the Church and among the public:

First, public theology must find ways to assert the importance of *society* as a distinct concept in American social thought. Recognition of the communal and familiar sources of personal identity will modify the dichotomy between the individual and the state that dominates much public discussion of human rights.

Second, because societal institutions in an era of advanced technology cannot function without the assistance of the state and cannot escape the formative influences of state policy, the Church must not restrict its task to protecting persons from unjust coercion by the state. Human rights are not secure unless they include the right to actual political participation and an effective voice in policy choices that establish the bounds of possibility for society's subsidiary institutions. This right of participation may be essential not only in the state but in large, state-like corporations or agencies that exert substantial control over the lives of persons.

Completing this part of Murray's agenda requires nothing radically new. The resources for a view of the state that stresses participation and mutual accountability are spread through the whole tradition of Christian political thought. It does, however, require explicit, normative choices among the legitimating ideologies that shape American public discourse. A public theology for the next decade must assert that a politics which stresses participation and accountability is both fundamental to the

requirements of human community and in keeping with the realities of human personality. The presence of the biblical tradition in American culture is an invaluable resource in the difficult process of pursuing these goals.

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### THE PERENNIAL NEED FOR PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

There are three distinct questions implicit in the discussion thus far. First, how to adjudicate claims and interests in a society which is increasingly interdependent at the national and international level. Second, how to develop a theory of justice which can integrate traditional human-rights claims of personal liberty with socioeconomic claims made in terms of individual and group rights. Third, how to determine which mode of public discourse will most faithfully and effectively draw upon the resources of Catholic tradition and project its vision and values into public-policy debate on the first two questions.

The first two questions must be faced by any person or institution desiring to enter the world of public policy today. The third question is specifically the theological issue, since it asks how the Church is to understand and fulfil the social ministry mandated by *Gaudium et spes* and *Justitia in mundo*. By examining this question against the backdrop of John Courtney Murray's work, this symposium narrows the focus of these questions to the role of the Church in the United States. Murray used a very definite style of public discourse, one rooted in theological assumptions but articulated in the philosophical categories of "the tradition of reason in public affairs." It is the style of *We Hold These Truths* and also the style of John XXIII's *Pacem in terris*.<sup>24</sup>

Murray's writing represents the most nuanced and sophisticated contemporary example of the Catholic tradition of philosophic discourse on the normative foundations of public life. The question being examined in this symposium is whether even this powerful statement of the public philosophy provides an adequate method for the Church to address the first two questions cited above. I am deeply interested in, but not yet convinced by, the argument that a more explicitly theological style of assertion, using religious symbols to interpret and adjudicate justice claims, is more appropriate to the questions faced by the Church in the United States today. To specify both my interest and my skepticism, it

<sup>24</sup> The distance, conceptually and methodologically, from *Pacem in terris* to *Gaudium et spes* is the background to the debate pursued in these pages. As Charles E. Curran has noted, in two years we move from the most explicit use of a natural-law ethic in Catholic social teaching to a theological statement which scarcely uses the phrase "natural law" (*Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1976] 116-30).

is necessary to distinguish the need for shaping "the mind of the Church" (as a community and an institution) regarding social questions from the task of projecting the perspective of the Church into the societal debate about normative questions of social policy.

Within the community of the Church, the utility of specifically theological argument, employing the full gamut of Christian symbolism, is beyond question. Such theological argument is indispensable in efforts both to identify the social issues facing the Christian conscience and to mobilize the Church in a coherent approach to specific issues. The conciliar text *Gaudium et spes* and the style of theological argument flowing from it since the Council have illustrated how Christological, anthropological, and ecclesiological themes, cast in biblical terms, can be used to shape a rich social vision. These categories are essential for establishing the centrality of the social ministry in the Church today. They reveal the key importance of response to structural questions of justice and peace in the Christian vocation today. Indeed, the most significant developments in Catholic social thought in the past twenty years have been precisely in the theological and ecclesiological, rather than the moral, dimensions of the teaching. Hence my interest in seeing this theological quest carried forward.

This question of shaping the internal vision and conviction of the Christian community must be distinguished, however, from the equally significant task of sharing the vision with the wider society. *Gaudium et spes* asserted that the Church could find no better way to express its concern for the world than to engage in dialogue with it. The debate we are having here about the relative merits of public philosophy or public theology is the necessary precondition for carrying out the mandate of the Council.

While remaining sympathetic to the possibilities of a public theology, I cannot agree that it should be the dominant mode of policy discourse for the Church. Some of the very reasons advanced in this discussion for moving toward a public theology seem to me to be arguments for retaining Murray's style of argumentation. The fact of growing interdependence and the consequent problems this creates for fulfilling competing human needs (e.g., domestic and international) cause me to hesitate about the usefulness of public theology in policy discussions. Interdependence points toward the need for systemic solutions which are persuasive for a multiplicity of actors with widely varying "faith visions." The pluralism of four parties which Murray described in *We Hold These Truths* is radically complicated when the debate about human rights and human needs is cast in a global framework.<sup>25</sup> Correlatively, the need for a

<sup>25</sup> Murray described the new state of the question, religiously and politically, in his last major theological article: "Church and State at Vatican II," *TS* 27 (1966) 582-83.

systemic theory of justice, encompassing the range of human rights contained in both U.N. covenants, poses problems for articulating such a theory in theological terms. If the theory must create a common ground of discourse, it is difficult to see how the effort will be advanced by retaining in an explicit way those images which are derived from the specific insights of faith. In brief, faced with both greater interdependence and an expanding framework of human-rights claims, I do not think we can do better than the style of public discourse found in *We Hold These Truths* and *Pacem in terris*.<sup>26</sup>

To assert a priority for public philosophy over a public theology does not imply remaining content with *We Hold These Truths* or *Pacem in terris*. Two tasks are important if the potential of a Catholic contribution to a viable public philosophy is to be realized. First, the Catholic community, especially those who articulate its vision of faith, need to be convinced of the distinct contribution which a philosophically strong social ethic has made in and through the Catholic tradition. The very power and richness of an evangelical ethic, drawing upon the prophetic resources of faith and stating the social question in the language of a challenge to radical conversion, can make the careful systematic distinctions of a philosophical ethic seem to be meagre fare. Yet, the complexity of the major social issues we face, combined with the need to enlist allies who must be persuaded of both the justice and feasibility of specific proposals, requires the sophisticated structure of the kind of philosophically rigorous social ethic which the Catholic tradition has produced in the past.<sup>27</sup> We must be convinced of the need for structured ethical discourse or we will fail to cultivate it in a manner appropriate to present conditions.

A renewed cultivation of the public philosophy is the second task.

<sup>26</sup> Ralph B. Potter makes the point from a perspective outside the Catholic dialogue, but within the style of the "tradition of reason": "But even if the faithful are motivated by Christian symbols to seek universal justice, the political power to accomplish the demands of justice has not been granted to the *koinonia*. This insufficiency in the practical order has implications for the Christian's mode of thinking and speaking about ethics. As I ponder the command of Christ, I conclude that love for my neighbor requires me to work for peace through participation in political movements by appeal to distinctively Christian categories. I must find some surrogate for one version or another of the natural law tradition. Short of the sudden conversion of all men to Christ, peace can best be served by a mutual recovery of common moral law known to 'men of sound reason'" (*War and Moral Discourse* [Richmond: John Knox, 1969] 18).

<sup>27</sup> The necessity for a public philosophy is not only the epistemological question of how we speak intelligibly in a pluralistic setting. It is also the need for mediating language which can move between the richness of biblical symbolism or theological affirmation and the empirical density of the complex technical issues which today make up the "social question." Murray sought to fashion such discourse in his call for "the vigorous cultivation of politico-moral science, with close attention to the enormous impact of technological developments on the moral order as well as on the political order" (*We Hold These Truths* 272).

Murray continually affirmed the need for a "growing edge" in the public philosophy. The growing edge is the product of continual adaptation of the style and structure of the public philosophy to new conditions and new questions. It is that task which needs to be undertaken in light of the new context of increasing interdependence and new forms of human-rights claims.

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#### EDITOR'S CONCLUSION: A FUNDAMENTAL POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The question at the center of this symposium can be restated as follows: How particularistic or how universalistic should the Christian contribution to American social thought be? As the contributors have shown, there are both distinct advantages and distinct disadvantages to an exclusive commitment to either side of the issue.

A public theology which addresses social issues in the symbolically rich language of Christian religion has great power to stimulate commitment and motivate action. A Christian public theology can appeal to symbols of community, human interdependence, and love, symbols which provide the kind of moral vision which American society is especially in need of today. Such a public theology can also tap one of the deepest strata of American culture, that of biblical religion. The active promotion of such symbolically rich perspectives in public debate opens up a way for the Church to exercise a role in the social-political life of the U.S. which is both active and distinctive. Counterbalancing these pluses are several minuses. A strictly particularist option for public theology is in danger of stimulating sectarian divisiveness in a society already sorely hurt by division and conflict. It also runs the risk of ignoring the crucial tasks of social analysis and philosophical reflection which are essential if action is to be guided by understanding as well as by passion. It assumes that the tradition of public philosophical discourse in America has little to teach the contemporary Christian community. Were it to abandon the effort at dialogue with this tradition, a theological approach would risk impoverishment of both theology and secular public debate.

Heavy reliance on philosophic discourse and secular warrants also has both advantages and disadvantages. Murray has shown us that the rigor of argument which is both philosophic and civil is the precondition for genuine understanding and wisdom in the social-political field. Respect for the experience and wisdom of other communities also demands it. Communication of values and convictions which are central in the Christian vision of a just society will be impossible in a pluralistic world without it. An exclusive reliance on concepts and norms derived from the tradition of American public philosophy, however, carries several serious dangers. Such an option makes several questionable assumptions about

the "state of the Union" and the state of moral discourse within the Union. It presumes that an American public philosophy is in our possession, that the concepts and norms of such a mode of discourse are stable and well articulated, and that they are adequately correlated with the Christian vision. None of these presumptions, however, is entirely valid. Finally, a strictly universalist approach overlooks the present and potential influence of Christian symbolism on America's sense of identity and community. In doing so, it fails to give needed attention to both the positive and negative impacts of the civil religion on the quality of moral life and public policy in America.

From this it is apparent that neither an exclusively particularist public theology nor an exclusively universalist public philosophy will serve the needs of the Church in the present historical moment. Bryan Hehir has suggested that reliance on philosophic analysis and discourse in the Church's participation in the policy process must be accompanied by theological reflection in the development and articulation of moral vision within the life of the Church itself. This distinction is clearly a valuable one. It is a distinction which differentiates the functions of philosophical and theological reflection on the basis of two different ecclesial tasks. In the view of the editor of this symposium, however, such an ecclesiological differentiation of functions needs to be supplemented by an analysis which seeks out a deeper unity underlying these two tasks. Whether the Christian vision of a just society can be adequately articulated in the available categories of the regnant American public philosophy is a question which can only be answered by fundamental theology. Similarly, the degree to which the received religious tradition of the Church needs correction or revision in light of secular knowledge and contemporary social experience is also a question for fundamental theology. In the words of David Tracy, in fundamental theology "the meanings discovered as adequate to our common human experience must be compared to the meanings disclosed as appropriate to the Christian tradition in order to discover how similar, different, or identical the former meanings are in relationship to the latter."<sup>28</sup> Public theology is the effort to discover and communicate the socially significant meanings of Christian symbols and tradition. Public philosophy is the effort to discover and communicate the significant meanings of common social and political experience in our pluralistic culture. Discovery of the relationship between these two spheres of meaning and of the relationship between the moral norms that these meanings imply is a properly theological task. It is a task that can be called fundamental political theology. A fundamental political theology which seeks to understand these relationships is thus essential if both

<sup>28</sup> David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 79.

public theology and public philosophy are to be truly critical. Both the formation of the Church's own social conscience and the vigorous engagement of the Church in secular discourse must be rooted in such fundamental theological reflection. Without such reflection public theology will lose contact with the ways God is actively present *in the contemporary social world*. Similarly, without such reflection public philosophy risks uncritical affirmation of the categories of contemporary culture and uncritical appropriation of cultural biases which are in contradiction with the moral content of the Christian faith.

The divergence in this symposium between John Coleman and Robin Lovin on the one hand and Bryan Hehir on the other seems to the editor to be rooted in their implicit suppositions on this fundamental theological level. Coleman and Lovin assume that the concepts and norms which govern much of contemporary American secular discourse are less than fully appropriate for the realization of the Christian vision of a just society. Consequently, they set out to criticize and challenge secular America from the standpoint of its own Christian heritage. Bryan Hehir, like John Courtney Murray, is more confident that the rigors of careful secular discourse open the Church to a deeper appreciation of the concrete meaning of justice in contemporary social life. Both are undoubtedly partially correct and both approaches are undoubtedly indispensable. Neither approach, however, is self-evidently complete in itself.

A fuller understanding of the appropriate contemporary relationships between the two emphases will be the result of further advances on the level of fundamental political theology in America. Though there are signs that this task is beginning to be addressed by American Catholic theologians,<sup>29</sup> the most recent efforts in this area have not addressed the critical relationship between Christian tradition and prevailing forms of *American* political and social discourse in a serious way. Though Murray's suppositions about the compatibility of these two traditions may be too simple, he took the American secular political tradition much more seriously than have most contemporary American theologians. Creative development of American Catholic social thought will occur when Murray's lead is followed in this regard. The Catholic community in the United States need not wait for such advances in order to speak and act in the public domain. But the Church will be ill served by the theological community unless "Catholic reflections on the American proposition" are carried forward on this fundamental level.

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Matthew Lamb, "Dogma, Experience and Political Theology," and David Tracy, "The Particularity and Universality of Christian Revelation," in Edward Schillebeeckx and Bas van Iersel, eds., *Revelation and Experience* (Concilium 113; New York: Seabury, 1979) 79-90, 106-16.