

on the question of what makes life meaningful. Modern literature sweepingly reinforces the Nietzschean insight that the pivotal contemporary event is the withdrawal of God from the world. While technological society attempts to capsulize consciousness, religious awareness begins with a reverential silence before the mystery of existence. Barrett advised in 1950: "In the meantime, one can only wait: the creative waiting in which one struggles to send one's roots deeper into life, and reconquer for oneself, in the openness toward Being, the primitive simplicities that our civilization has lost and without which life has no meaning—no, none at all." Barrett prophesied the emergence of a new moral and religious consciousness. His personal wait was answered by a mystical encounter with God.

Barrett professes to a "private religion," not belonging to any organized church.³ Apparently preferring Kierkegaard to John Henry Newman, Barrett doesn't elaborate on how his solitary mysticism can be incarnated into a public faith. Will this religious revival occur within or outside of the Christian tradition? Is the Christian faith epiphenomenal and beyond redemption? Or do all religions point ecumenically toward the same universal vision? The vitally required religious culture is premised upon the discovery of common answers to the perennial questions that confront mankind. This culture establishes the collective denominator for an ethos grounding human freedom and dignity. While taking a significant step in turning intellectuals toward religious awareness, Barrett will hopefully address these issues in the future.

When recalling his adventures among the New York intellectuals, Barrett scarcely mentions his contributions to the intellectual current. He appears as the house gentile, more an observer than a participant. As a closet conservative, he exerted an influence through circumspection,—anonymous editorials, literary criticism, structuring symposia, and scholarly philosophical works.⁴ One can only speculate that he took his professional academic duties seriously. He focused upon the philosophic-religious roots of the modern crisis instead of its political symptoms.

Though many of the book's chapters originally appeared in *Commentary*, Barrett's profound outlook is not a by-product but a seminal influence on the neoconservative movement. *The Truants* should effectively disseminate this outlook to a wider audience. The book should also confirm Barrett as one of the most gifted writers and erudite cultural critics of our time.

Reviewed by GARY B. BULLERT

¹James Burnham, "Lenin's Heir," *Partisan Review* (Winter 1945), 61–73. ²See "Religion and the Intellectuals," *Partisan Review* (February 1950), 103–142. See also "The New Failure of Nerve," *Partisan Review* (January 1943), 2–56. ³William Barrett, "Religion and the Intellectuals," *Partisan Review* (May 1950), 457. ⁴Barrett did occasionally venture into politics. See William Barrett, "World War III: Ideological Conflict," *Partisan Review* (September 1950), 651–660; "Culture Conference at the Waldorf," *Commentary* (May 1949), 487–493.

The Limits of Politics

Christianity and Politics, by James V. Schall, *Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981. 342 pp. \$6.95 (paper \$5.95).*

CERTAIN BEGUILLED intellectuals of the Nazi era, such as Carl Schmitt, started a tradition of "doing political theology" that is today carried forward by a sizable segment of the "liberation theologians." Whereas Schmitt's system sacralized an ultranationalist, fascist dictatorship, the Christian Marxists would have us believe that a sacred empire is emerging as predicted by "internationalist" Leninism—a world-system of socialist, people's democracies.

This collection of lucid essays by Georgetown University government professor James V. Schall—many previously published, but revised for the purpose of this volume—repudiates all efforts to make

Christianity sacralize any political ideology or system. Schall makes an invaluable contribution to the contemporary discussion by clarifying the transcendent focus of Christianity, while giving proper due to the importance of politics in the Christian doctrine of the temporal world, and by exploring the mechanisms for achieving proximate justice in a fallen world. He tells us in the Introduction that he seeks "an understanding of the world, man, and God that results precisely from the 'localizing' of politics into its proper sphere." Even in a book devoted largely to political controversy, Schall deliberately sets out to add to our understanding of Christian spirituality. Unlike Schmitt or many a liberation theologian, Schall will not try to sell the reader a "heaven on earth." "This will not be a 'political theology,'" he writes, "something which seeks to exalt religion by making politics the central human and religious project."

Jacques Maritain argued, in *Humanisme Intégral* (1936), that the French term *théologie politique* stood for "a science of an object *secular and temporal*, which judges and knows this object in the light of [supernaturally] revealed principles." But Maritain criticized the Germans' *politische Theologie* because "the object itself of which it is a question is not really secular and temporal; the object itself is 'holy' (*heilig*)."¹ Thus the Nazi intellectuals became theorists of *Sacrum Imperium*.

Schall is thoroughly familiar with Maritain's political writings, as his frequent references indicate. And he clearly shares Maritain's viewpoint. It would be a better strategy, in my opinion, if Schall would take up the term "political theology," using it in the correct and orthodox sense as Maritain did, rather than risk leaving the impression that only Christian Marxists lay claim to this valuable piece of intellectual turf. Indeed, it might even be possible to rehabilitate the notion of "liberation" from those who would put Christian theology in the service of Marxist enslavement.

Schall is at his best in discussing the historical sources of Christian political theory and the application of this tradition to contemporary problems. He suggests a cur-

riculum for the serious student who wants to understand the classical and medieval roots of our ethical and political discourse: Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, the Old and New Testaments, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. He points out the depths of insight which could be achieved by a thorough study of the deaths of Socrates and Jesus. Sad to say, Schall is correct in observing that a large proportion of liberal arts college students are not being exposed to the very core of the tradition of liberty. It is my experience as a teacher of such students that they respond well to the challenges and rewards of such assignments. Schall's "curriculum proposal" should be given serious consideration.

One of Christianity's greatest contributions to political thought is its insistence on the sinfulness of man. Yet, Christianity affirms progress. Man, the political animal, has a significant role to fulfill: the "maximalization of the human potential." This is not his supernatural end, but it is his temporal mission. Schall writes: "Christianity's influence on politics will suggest that good and evil are real factors in human life, not just arbitrary or changeable particulars." Most political choices are between the better of two goods or, looked at from the other side, between the lesser of two evils. Christianity does not delude itself about the fallenness, the finitude, of man. It sees the necessary lesser evil for what it is, and paradoxically maintains that it is the ethically good choice.

It is precisely the failure to accept the paradoxical nature of political existence and the compromises necessary for the establishment of proximate justice that characterizes the political and theological absolutisms of our day. Schall's principal targets are many, but somehow they are related: atheistic humanism (the view that "man gives himself his own law and his own being"); Christian Marxism ("the suppressing of the notion of a *common good* in favor of a class which bears the sign of history"); and radical bio-conservationism (the attempt to "restructure man from the inside of his very body," with the sole value being the perpetuation and perfection of the bodily species). This last viewpoint Schall accurately connects with the excesses of the pro-abortion and pro-eutha-

nasia movements, and he notes that it is often at odds with Marxism. What each of these movements has in common is the rejection of precisely that Christian doctrine of the reality and limits of temporal progress that is implied in the Biblical notion of sin. To see man as responsible before the Absolute is to recognize that the supernatural end of man is beyond all political or scientific attempts to "save" mankind. One almost hears an echo of the fabled Vietnam War commander: "We had to destroy humanity in order to save it."

Christianity and Politics offers a saner political program for solving the social problem, particularly the problem of poverty, than do the aforementioned "revolutionary spiritualities." Schall points out the general failure, even among Western intellectuals, to understand that poverty is not cured by more powerful governments taking over and "rationalizing" the production of goods and services. Neither is poverty cured by massive transfers of wealth, particularly when these are not accompanied by a transfer of the techniques and technologies for *producing* wealth. "Real development," he argues, "depends rather on strictly personal values and initiatives within an economic and political framework designed to allow and aid and reward newness and growth that comes into the world because of human intelligence and energy, the only real source of wealth in the world, ultimately the only 'resource.' " Schall reviews the contemporary reexamination of capitalism that is taking place today among neoconservative thinkers as a result of the vast and obvious failures of socialist schemes of development. "Paradoxically," he notes, the conservative has become the political optimist, the practical man of our time, the one who can figure out what really needs to be done."

Schall explicitly writes within a Thomistic, natural-law tradition. His chapter "On the Christian Statement of the Natural Law" makes it absolutely clear that "intelligence is an essential aspect of faith itself."

Christianity accepts nature, the natural tendency in man to search for a higher standard than custom or opinion. And that standard is not a reification but an ontological reality. There is a renewed interest in natural law principles as a solution to the ethical relativism of the contemporary positivists. Yet, Schall observes, a major segment of the new natural-law theorists are followers of Professor Leo Strauss; they emphasize the classical, philosophical expressions of natural law while rejecting a specifically Christian natural law. To them "Aquinas was much too specific" about the content of natural law, "too much conditioned by the divine law." Schall's presentation of Strauss' views is fair and his criticisms are on target. The possibility is left open that Strauss intended to convert the modern skeptic to a classical way of thinking as a prelude to gaining the ability to hear the claims of revelation. In the end, this is probably what Strauss himself could not do. Schall emphasizes the Christian belief that grace perfects nature, that "men are not in Christianity encouraged to become Greek gods to stand against the ages in perfect form, but they are urged to save their souls, as it is put, in whatever society they might find themselves, worst as well as best."

There are many revealing passages in *Christianity and Politics* and not a little incisive criticism destined to make Schall's ideological opposites more than mildly uneasy. It is curiously appropriate to sum up this volume with a quotation from its final chapter, which appeals for a "Christian contemplative view" that knows that a person's relationship to God transcends every political form. Politics is limited. We should let politics be politics, not a pseudo-religion. Man does not create God's Kingdom on earth. "It is as man, not someone else, that we are saved." As Thomas a Kempis said, "*Homo es, et non Deus: caro es, non Angelus.*"

Reviewed by JOHN W. COOPER

Capitalism and Democracy

The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism, by Michael Novak, *New York: An American Enterprise Institute/Simon & Schuster Publication, 1982. 433 pp. \$17.50.*

IT WAS NOT UNTIL fourth grade, and then quite by accident, that I discovered the concept of order in nature. My neighbor, Mrs. Brown, had presented me with a microscope as a reward for shoveling the snow from her driveway, the perfect present for any ten-year-old boy. Immediately, of course, I wanted to examine the sorts of exotic specimens featured in the slick catalogue which accompanied the microscope, but in the relative tameness of suburban New Jersey, few such specimens were to be found. Greatly disheartened, I turned my attention to the ordinary things around me—hair follicles, bread molds, leaves, splinters, insects, skin tissue, various pieces of cloth, and whatever else I could cut and fit onto one of my glass slides.

What I discovered, to my wonder, was wonder itself. The common objects of my home and yard—which hitherto had appeared jumbled, bland, and chaotic—under close scrutiny revealed their own intricate symmetries. A miscellaneous swatch of fabric was transformed into an amazing pattern of seemingly infinite interweaving threads. The ordinary bread mold yielded a panorama of bursting colors, and skin tissue, with its thousands of independent cells, displayed a complex structural unity. And if maple and pine leaves were different, it did not imply a foul-up in nature as much as it illustrated the fact of complexity. The world I had thought eclectic and bland proved to have a harmony and vigor of its own; only I had not seen it.

In much the same manner, Mr. Michael Novak chides the modern intellectual, and especially the modern theologian, for not looking beneath the apparent tawdriness and disorder of the common market for its underlying spirit and structure. The result of this failure is that capitalism, while visibly superior to either socialism or mercantilism

on an empirical level, nonetheless suffers from an inadequate intellectual appreciation and concomitant moral defense. But in *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Novak draws out the moral and philosophical premises girding the American market system, concluding that the link between capitalism and democracy is not merely accidental, but necessary.

This itself is a remarkable conversion. For a long time Novak was a socialist, albeit a democratic socialist, seeing in socialism a greater sense of community and fraternity (in tune with his Slavic Catholic heritage) than the individualist strains of the free market. But, as time went on, Novak perceived that while socialism was morally superior as an *ideal*, in practice it left much to be desired. Later, as socialist nations were inevitably turning poor and oppressive, Novak began to question even the *ideal* of socialism, leading him also to a further examination of the free market, which he previously had thought bland and spiritually sterile.

The path Novak followed has not been one well trodden by intellectuals. Capitalism, as he points out, has developed primarily on the practical, not theoretical, level. While there are legions of journalists, professors, ministers, priests, and poets to praise the promises of socialism, there are relatively few to sing the joys of the free market. It is the lowly businessman, besmeared with the stain of commerce, who has inherited the mantle of Adam Smith. Consequently, even those who are avowedly pro-capitalist themselves tend to lack a clear perception of their system's ethical vision or even an understanding that their system does have order. "It works," is all they are likely to say, most of them not sure *why* it works.

And it does work; of that there is little doubt. Two-hundred years ago, life in the United States was just as squalid as it was on the rest of the earth, backwards, just shucking off a colonial past. Today, however, it is the wealthiest nation in the world, the proof of which is the millions of immigrants dying to reach her shores. Capitalism has also brought prosperity to other formerly impoverished nations like Hong Kong and South Korea, and to once-devastated countries like