Professor Varacalli in this stimulating essay continues the vibrant discussion initiated by his first essay which was delivered at the Convention of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars in Los Angeles. He raises a number of vital questions concerning the future of the Catholic Church in the United States and the tensions involved in the development of a “neo-orthodoxy”.

INTRODUCTION

His essay can best be understood as a logical and necessary follow-up to a paper, “The State of the American Catholic Laity: Propositions and Proposals,” published in Faith & Reason (vol. XIII, no. 2, June, 1987). The latter was primarily concerned with providing an objective analysis of the present religious state of affairs in the United States with a specific focus on the American Catholic laity. Given both my personal faith commitment and that my analysis did not paint a healthy and vibrant religious picture, I ended that essay by suggesting and defending certain proposals aimed at the restoration of an authentic Catholic presence in the United States. Some of the proposals were “negative” in nature calling for the exercise of various forms of religious sanction that are available to the Bishops to be used against prominent dissenters. Other proposals were “positive” in nature emphasizing the educational and evangelization opportunities that can be grasped by today’s Church leadership. None of the more “positive” proposals were more important than my call for:

The emergence and institutionalization of a ‘neo-orthodox’ center, loyal to the letter of Vatican II, (which) is a presupposition for maintaining the unity, continuity, and universalism of the Catholic Church in the United States. The chances of saving a larger percentage of American Catholics from heterodoxy and shortening the upcoming civil war in the U.S. Catholic Church lies in the development of an updated neo-orthodoxy which incorporates modern methods from the social sciences and humanities to defend, propound, and maintain the eternal truths of Catholicism. Such a neo-orthodoxy represents a ‘via media’ between traditional and modern worldviews and provides Catholics with an intelligent and most persuasive synthesis of faith and reason.¹

This essay, then, will attempt to more fully elaborate what I mean by this “updated neo-orthodoxy.” Furthermore, it will be argued that this updated neo-orthodoxy can provide a plausible, and perhaps even compelling, solution to the single greatest issue that today confronts the Catholic Church, to wit: the matter of “authority.” On the one hand, the issue of who legitimately protects the faith, interprets the tradition, and controls the internal decision-
making of the Church is a perennial one. On the other hand, the argument made here is that this seemingly perennial “crisis of authority” has reached its historic high-point in the post-Vatican II Catholic Church, especially in the United States.

This is so, as I’ve argued in my Toward The Establishment of Liberal Catholicism in America (1983), because of an “elective affinity” taking place between, and a pragmatic alliance emerging among, two powerful contemporary forces. The first is that of a secular humanism that is both overtly and subtly antagonistic to Catholicism and to any other supernaturalist religion and that is increasing its control over the “public sphere” of American life (e.g. government, education, mass media, etc.). The second is that of a “new Catholic knowledge class” which - for reasons of status and power - is consciously fostering an erroneous and highly selective interpretation of Vatican II and post-Vatican II documents along “progressive” lines. By doing so, the new Catholic knowledge class attempts to wrest control away from the Magisterium, or teaching authority of the Pope and of those Bishops in loyal communion with him, of the right to create, interpret, and implement religious doctrine and the social policy programs that emanate from such. Put into neo-conservative sociological language, a newly emerging knowledge class of intellectuals - legitimated in their own minds by their degrees in theology, philosophy, social science, and the humanities - is presently engaging the Magisterium in class warfare. The distorted new Catholic knowledge class interpretation of Vatican II and post-Vatican II theology encourages conceptions like that of “the Church as the people of God,” “individual conscience as the supreme subjective,” “collegiality,” “ecumenicity,” and “justice in the world” to justify a practical, if not theoretical, merger of Catholicism, in both her internal organization and relationship to the world, with the worldview and agenda of secularism and liberal religiosity, especially with liberal Protestantism. This agenda and worldview is one that aggrandizes, in short, pluralism and materialism in both thought and action and stands, as such, in sharp contrast to the Catholic commitment to truth and priority to otherworldly salvation. Let me immediately add that an orthodox interpretation of Vatican II must acknowledge the legitimacy of the modern-day reality of democracy and this-worldliness but these phenomena must be contained within and be co-opted by the Catholic tradition.

Given my understanding of the centrality and indispensability of the role of the Magisterium in Catholic belief and practice, let me restate my previously published understanding of what constitutes “orthodoxy” and “heterodoxy”:

‘Orthodox’ Catholics are defined as those who affirm the legitimacy of both the Catholic conception of the Magisterium and of what Avery Dulles in his Models of the Church has termed the ‘institutional model’ of the Catholic Church. Heterodox Catholics are defined as those Catholics who, in accepting a unilinear evolutionary understanding of the future of the Catholic Church that posits the ultimate supremacy of ‘individual conscience,’ reject both the conceptions of the Magisterium and of the institutional model. It is important to point out two things about the definitions just offered. First of all, they are ‘religious’ and not ‘political’ definitions. Put another way, an ‘orthodox’ or ‘heterodox’ Catholic may be either politically liberal or conservative (although empirically there is a tendency, respectively, for orthodox religious and conservative political orientations and heterodox religious and liberal political orientations to be positively associated with each other). Secondly, each definition allows a considerably wide spectrum of alternatives to co-exist within it. Put another way, ‘orthodoxy’ includes not only traditional ‘propositional literalists’ but ‘neo-orthodox’ who accept modern social scientific and humanistic methods to obtain traditionally religious doctrinal conclusions. Conversely, ‘heterodoxy’ includes those who range from having no use whatsoever for the concepts of the Magisterium/institutional Church to those who consider such allegiances to be ‘optional’ or non-binding in the exercise of the Catholic faith.
By an “updated neo-orthodoxy” I mean an approach that utilizes distinctly modern intellectual disciplines to defend, propound, and maintain an authentic Catholicism, i.e., a Catholicism consistent with the traditional teachings of the Church up until, including, and beyond the second Vatican Council. It is important here to make three points. First of all, the Angelic Doctor himself, St. Thomas Aquinas, could be logically labelled a “neo-orthodox” thinker in his day given that he incorporated the best of the Aristotelian philosophical tradition for the Church. The incorporation that I am concerned about in this essay comes mainly from the social sciences but also includes the various methods and insights from modern-day philosophies and other humanities. Secondly, it is important to stress that orthodoxy requires the subordination of the insights of philosophy (whether classical or modern) or the social sciences and humanities to “official” Catholic theology. Put another way, the orthodoxy of St. Thomas is derived from the fact that he co-opted Aristotle and not the other way around. Put simply, St. Thomas incorporated Greek reason within a Christian faith, Greek cyclical thought within Christian revelation, Greek human nature within Christian grace, Greek fate within Christian responsibility and freedom and the Greek emphasis on the eternal within the Christian emphasis on the divine. What would make any particular tradition of sociology, for instance, orthodox is the ability of the “Catholic sociologist” to incorporate the contingent and conditional (e.g. culture, socio-economic class, geography, race, sex, ethnicity, language, etc.) within a system of Catholic absolute truths about man and society in their relationship to God in which the latter “leads” the sociological research enterprise. Put into the language of contemporary “cybernetics theory,” orthodoxy requires that philosophy or sociology or other secular disciplines stand in a “cybernetically subordinate” relationship to a Catholic theology, as defined by the Magisterium, which occupies a “command post” position which simultaneously allows a vivifying input from the former intellectual disciplines while, at the same time, controlling the nature, i.e., the flow, speed, extent, and content, of that input. Third and finally, it is crucial to understand that the contemporary secular age does not encourage any cybernetic arrangement that favors supernatural religion. The usual modern-day arrangement, at least in non-communist societies, is to allow traditional religion to exist but in a flaccid, secondary, and privatized state. Thus, Max Scheler, in his Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge, argues against Auguste Comte’s assertion that religious, metaphysical, and scientific cultures exist in a zero-sum relationship to each other. Rather, for Scheler, religious and metaphysical knowledge coexist at each stage of history, although the present age gives primacy (or similarly, in the language of this essay, “cybernetic superiority”) to science. As a matter of fact, a recent book of importance authored by Timothy Arthur Lines, Systemic Religious Education, explicitly utilizes cybernetic theory as a vehicle simultaneously to incorporate and subordinate traditional religion to social science or, as I’ve previously put it, “to create an immanentist religion of social science.” Regardless of the very problematic issue of whether or not a cybernetic theory adapted to defend the eternal truths of Catholicism could ever gain widespread support in our secular society or even within the contemporary Catholic intellectual community, the attempt here is nonetheless to move in such a direction. At the very worst, an updated neo-orthodoxy could buttress those forces loyal to the Magisterium in their present battle with Catholic heterodoxy intellectuals by “neutralizing” the latter’s monopoly on whatever legitimation is afforded through the mastery and utilization of the social sciences and other modern scholarly methods.

The locating of an “official” Catholic theology in a “command post” position vis-a-vis non-Magisterial “input” simultaneously defends the centrality of the Magisterium and incorporates and respects, relative to previous doctrinal pronouncements, the “democratic” and “this-worldly” aspects of Vatican II. The positing of such a cybernetic relationship allows not only for the legitimate existence within the Catholic Church of less inclusive sects/cults and for the exercise of individual conscience but also for a healthy and vibrant social Catholicism. Such a relationship allows for an enlivening and, in some cases, Spirit-filled input from non-Magisterial components of the “people of God” - including theologians and the other elements of the new Catholic knowledge class - provided, once again, that the Magisterium stands in ultimate judgement over these initiatives.

This essay assumes the following points: 1) Christ is the Truth and the Way. 2) While all interpretations of the Gospel - along denominational and individual lines - are culturally conditioned, the specific interpretation of the Roman Catholic Church is the fullest, but not nec-
necessarily the complete, expression of that Truth. 3) The teachings of the Magisterium represent the fullest expression of the Truth of Roman Catholicism. “Dissent” from the Magisterium is allowed if by dissent is meant the mere public acknowledgement of a “cognitive anomaly” between a finding of an intellectual inquiry and an official Church teaching. Legitimate dissent requires, however, 1) much prayer and soul-searching, 2) an exhaustion of the intellectual attempt to honestly square faith and reason, and 3) the ultimate subordination of the intellectual inquiry to the teaching authority of the Magisterium. The intellectual search and its findings are, in short, 1) encouraged by the Magisterium, 2) publicly “offered up” as a potential contribution from a member of the “people of God” to the total Church and to the society-at-large, and 3) required to stand under the judgement of the Magisterium - past, present, and future. Such an arrangement is quite similar in form to that of St. Thomas when he distinguishes between the role of reason in discerning the “natural law” of God and the role of faith in acknowledging the revelation, mystery, and paradox in the “divine law” of God. In such a model, faith is seen as an intelligent, qualified and short “leap,” in contrast, for instance, to the Lutheran understanding that accentuates the distinction between faith and reason. Where the latter often drown in the “fiery brook” of relativity, Catholics can better, and in any intellectually honest way, navigate the river of uncertainty.

This essay will first place the attempt at providing a neoorthodox ceasefire within a contemporary sociological context of a badly polarized Catholic Church. Then it will be argued that the centrality of the Magisterium, in at least a “cybernetically superordinate” sense, is constitutive of any legitimate, i.e. “orthodox,” depiction of the Catholic faith. This will be executed, both conceptually and historically, in light of the “Christ and culture” framework propounded by H.R. Niebuhr and the religious typology provided by Ernest Troeltsch. It will be argued that the principle Catholic model is the “Christ above culture” alternative developed by St. Thomas although the post-Vatican II Church has adapted this model by including elements of the Lutheran “Two Kingdoms” and Calvinist “Christ the Transformer” models. The paper then moves on to provide and analyze examples of “neo-orthodox” methods - or, more accurately, what could easily develop into neo-orthodox methods. These include, foremost, my present efforts at resurrecting the idea of “Catholic sociologies.” Also introduced, again with important qualifications noted, is the work of Avery Dulles, S.J. on pluralism within the Church, of Michael Novak on the relationship of “democratic capitalism” to social Catholicism, of George Weigel on the understanding of the evolution of the Catholic moral tradition on the issue of war and peace, and of Paul E. Sigmund in developing a dynamic conception of natural law theory. The essay concludes with a brief discussion of the “plausibility” or “conditions of acceptability” of Catholic “neoorthodoxy” in the modern world.

IMPEENDING CIVIL WAR

My attempt to articulate a neo-orthodox solution to the present-day crisis of authority should be seen in a sociological context that argues that the situation that the Catholic Church in the U.S. today faces is nothing less than a full-blown intellectual civil war that threatens to quickly include the average Catholic-in-the-pews. The brilliant analyses of Monsignor George A. Kelly, The Battle for the American Church (1979) and Crisis of Authority (1982) have more than proved their worth; the forces and figures involved in the studies have only magnified, leading to, for practical purposes, a schism of a de facto nature at least for the Catholic intellectual community. It is important to point out here the important boundary-creating and maintaining functions performed by intellectuals for the communities that they allegedly represent. Simply put, the fact that intellectuals have chosen not to carve out any neo-orthodox center today forces the average American Catholic to choose from extreme options, that is, traditionalist and secularist.

On the one side of the contemporary barricades one finds a somewhat uneasy alliance of Catholic traditionalists - who see less need for any intellectual defense and explication of the truths propounded by the Magisterium to either the Catholic community or outer society - with neo-orthodox thinkers who are more modern in that they have attempted to cross the “fiery brook” of modern-day relativity without drowning in it. The former can be represented as the stalwarts of those forces loyal to the historic and central role that the Magisterium plays in the life of the Catholic Church. The latter are representatives of a liberal Catholicism that is consciously attempting to stay within the boundaries of an orthodox Catholicism while “updating it” by defending it in light of what is seen to be the religious, intellectual, and moral realities and needs of the present situation. On one hand, the alliance is very real; both groups perceive the Roman Catholic Church to be in a titanic struggle with the forces
of a secularism bent on the destruction of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, the alliance is very precarious because of mutual suspicion. The traditionalists are wary of what they feel are the contaminating effects of modern methods on the neo-orthodox. The neo-orthodox, for their part, are all-too-aware of the rejection, suspicion, or at least indifference afforded modern methods by the traditionalists. Put into the suggestive typology of Lutheran theologian George A. Lindbeck, (The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post Liberal Age, 1984), Catholic traditionalists take a “pre-liberal” stance to religious doctrine while what I’m calling an up-dated neo-orthodoxy takes on something approximating a “post-liberal” stance to doctrine. Modernist Catholic heterodox tend to take what Lindbeck refers to as a typically “liberal” stance to doctrine seeing the latter as merely a symbolic expression of universal and unchanging religious “experience.” As uneasy as it may be, the traditionalist and neo-orthodox alliance is fueled, at least to a large degree, by their mutually greater repugnance to the liberal approach to doctrine. As Richard John Neuhaus put it in his The Catholic Moment (1987):

Postliberals tend to be more critical of liberals than of preliberals. That is because postliberalism shares preliberalism’s suspicion that liberalism ends up in robbing doctrines of their normative status. On the other hand, postliberalism is convinced that, even if we wanted to, there is no going back to preliberalism. In the case of the postliberal, as in the case of the postmodern, the fiery brook has been crossed.

The other side of the barricades finds itself united in a purely negative sense; the unifying cement of the Catholic heterodox lies precisely in its opposition to the traditionalism and authority represented in the Catholic heritage. The dissenters include strong representation from Marxists, feminists, homosexuals, and most importantly in a numerical sense, “Anglicized” Catholics who see liberal Protestantism with its positing of the primacy of a basically anti-institutional, antinomian “conscience” and with its ultimate reduction of doctrine to “experience” to be the normative destiny of the Catholic religion.

Without a doubt, it is the work of Father Andrew M. Greeley, through his celebration of the concept of “communal Catholicism,” that can best conceptualize and advocate the existing dissent and potential rebellion in today’s Church. By a communal Catholicism, Greeley means a highly selective and individualistic Catholic expression that picks and chooses pieces of Catholic doctrine to either accept, reject, ignore or indiscriminately synthesize with secular/Protestant ideas. At a practical level, a communal Catholic translates into “anything but an ecclesiastical Catholic.” While I (along with co-author Anthony L. Haynor) have previously criticized Greeley sociologically precisely on the grounds of the conceptual fuzziness of his idea, it is clear that the term can include any number of cultural/individual reductions of the Catholic faith along ideological, ethnic, socio-economic class, and psychological lines. Thus, U.S. communal Catholics consist of those whose Catholicism is translated and reduced to, for instance, Marxism, nationalism, feudalism (ideological), or to Italianess, Irishness, Spanishness (ethnicity), or to class (lower, middle, upper), and to human mental and emotional needs for security (as is the case for some in the cursillo, charismatic, or other spiritual renewal movements). Put another way, communal Catholics are examples of what Gordon Allport meant by “extrinsic” or “immature” religion. While it is, of course, true that all religions, including Catholicism, are inevitably mediated through both social forms and individual experience (an important starting point for Catholic neo-orthodoxy), the key to the question of the authenticity of any religious experience lies precisely in the balance between religion, on the one hand, and on the other, culture and the individual. Authenticity requires the subordination of the latter to the former. In the specific case of Catholicism, authenticity requires the subordination (although not the reduction) of both cultural and individual social realities to that of the Magisterium of the Church, i.e. to that location that has historically defined the essence of and set the parameters of the faith. In the case of Protestantism, religious authority implies the subordination of cultural manifestation and individual need to an individually interpreted Scriptural basis.

Cultural and individual reduction does not exhaust, however, the meaning of a “communal Catholicism.” It also includes those nominal Catholics who are, indeed, religious but religious in a distinctly “liberal Protestant” individualized way. The Protestant position, played out to its fullest, is exemplified by theologian-historian Ernest Troeltsch’s evolutionary understanding of an inevitable religious movement from “Church” to “sect” to a highly individualized “mysticism.” In the words of sociologists Nicholas J. Demerath and Philip Hammond:
Troeltsch contrasted both church and sect to still a third type of religious expression: mysticism ... Troeltsch pictured it less in terms of a withdrawn contemplation of the world and more in terms of an active antiasociationalism in which the individual departs organized religion to go it alone within the world rather than outside of it. Thus, Troeltsch predicted that mysticism would become a dominant form of religion among the well-educated middleclasses. He saw it as a liberalizing spirit within Protestantism that would eclipse both the church and sect as religious molds.13

As Troeltsch put it himself in his *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (1931):

We must not forget that the whole of the later Middle Ages, with the growth of an independent lay civilization in the cities, itself created a powerful competition with the previous world of thought which had been controlled by the Church and particularly by the priests. Its first effort was naturally to limit the power of the ecclesiastical civilization; that, however, was followed by an increasing disintegration of the objective side of religion in general, as it was expressed in the institutional conception of the Church ... Through all these movements, however, a sociological type of Christian thought was being developed, which was not the same as the sect type; it was, in fact, a new type - the radical religious individualism of mysticism. This type has no desire for an organized fellowship; all it cares for was freedom for interchange of ideas, a pure fellowship of thought ... In this type, therefore, ... the isolated individual, and psychological abstraction and analysis become everything ... This type, however, only attained its universal historical significance in the latter Protestant Dissenters, and in their connection with Humanism.14

Monsignor George A. Kelly adds the following critique from the Roman Catholic perspective:

Protestantism by definition was geared to almost any idea that accentuated individual religious experience. Lacking magisterium, by which all new Catholic interpretations must be measured, Protestantism (except its fundamentalists) was forced by its inner logic to make faith concepts and moral precepts almost a matter of scientific determination. Ernest Troeltsch (1865-1923) ... was an important contributor to Protestant accommodation. He wanted a vital Christianity, and thought its survival depends on a restructured modern dress. ‘Absolutes’ had to go and ‘personal satisfaction’ had to rise as a norm of religious relevance. Troeltsch does not ask: ‘How can I find God?’ but ‘How can I find my soul?’ He did not even think that Jesus was necessary to Christianity, since Christ was more a symbol of a community than a spokesman of God’s revelation. Though a Protestant, Troeltsch thought the reformed churches retained too many features of Catholic Christianity. The modern age to him meant the religious autonomy of man - against both Protestant and Catholic worldviews, if need be.15

“Communal Catholicism,” then, as a concept includes those who have accepted the so-called “Protestant principle” stressing the absoluteness of individual interpretation and the idea that the Church is primarily an “invisible” reality - a reality that, by the way, becomes quite visible sociologically when the concept is interpreted and actualized, as inevitably it must. It also includes those, as previously analyzed, who have, knowingly or not, capitulated to any of the too-numerous-to-repeat cultural forces (and fads) of the contemporary American scene. (Much of liberal Protestantism, following the logic of Monsignor Kelly, is really, then, not an “authentic” religious expression as here defined because of its massive reduction to cultural fads and individual self-interest; an assertion that should be noted but cannot be pursued at this point).

The “battle,” then, for the Catholic Church in the United States consists of those who, on the one hand, line up on the side of the Catholic tradition in one way or another (with its conceptions of ecclesiastical authority, sacramental grace, otherworldliness, and individual salvation as mediated through the Church) and those who either reject the Catholic tradition outright and would secularize it or those who would, more likely, “prot-
estantize it” through an acceptance of an evolutionary scheme that posits an ultimate reign of individual autonomy. The “communal Catholicism” camp of Andrew Greeley finds its theoretical legitimation in a wide range of intellectual sources that range from Ernest Troeltsch’s analysis of an ascendant “mysticism” to Georg Hegel’s philosophy of history, to Peter L. Berger’s discussion of his “inductive” theological approach to Robert Bellah’s analysis of “religious evolution.” The massive reality that must be confronted, however, is the existence of a huge “gap” between the underlying worldviews and assumptions regarding man, society, and the Church that undergird these two camps. Put another way, the question facing U.S. Catholicism today is, “Can anything close the gap between the understanding of the Church Magisterium and an Andrew Greeley?”

CHRIST AND CULTURE: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE WITHIN THE CATHOLIC MODEL

In his justifiably celebrated work, *Christ and Culture* (1951), published before Vatican II, H.R. Niebuhr presents five “idealtypical” relationships between Christianity and surrounding society. At the extremes are the “Christ of culture” and the “Christ against culture” options. The first makes, more or less, a perfect identification between Christianity and the structures and processes of society. Theologically, this position is best represented by such gnostic thinkers as Theodotus and Monoimus and, sociologically, an approximation can be found in the work of Talcott Parsons who had argued the subtle, but for him real, influences that Christianity has had on the culture and the institutions of modern-day American life as well as on the personality formation of the average American. The individual and society are influenced by Christianity through the reality, for Parsons, of an “institutionalized individualism.” The second model posits, more or less, a perfect disjunction between Christianity and the world. Theologically, this position is represented by the early Christian Tertullian who characteristically quipped, “What has Athens, i.e., the ‘world,’ have to do with Jerusalem, i.e. God?” This early “primitive” Christian theological perspective, influenced greatly by the eschatological hopes for an imminent return of the Lord and subsequent rejection of everything of a this-worldly nature, cannot by its very logic have a sociological analogue. This option lives on today in various sect-like versions of the Christian faith.

Niebuhr posited three intermediate idealypical relationships between Christianity and culture/intellectual activity have much to offer. The first, as with the previously noted work of Timothy Limes, subordinates the supernatural to the natural creating at best an immanentist religion of science or philosophy or social sciences or the humanities. At the very worst, this model reduces religion right out of existence. The nature of such reductions can, of course, vary. For Emile Durkheim, religion was nothing more than the “collective conscience” of society. For Karl Marx, religion was only the “opiate of the masses.” For Sigmund Freud, religion represented an “illusion” for many modern-day individuals who are “superego” controlled. The number of such reductions can be multiplied ad nauseam.

Niebuhr posited three intermediate idealtypical relationships between Christianity and culture: the Lutheran “two kingdoms” model, the Calvinist “Christ the transformer of culture” model, and the medieval Catholic “Christ above culture” model. The first option posits, on the one hand, the absolute majesty and “otherness” of God and, on the other, the absolute profanity and mundaneness of things of this world. Sociologically, this position is represented by the “early” work of Lutheran theologian-sociologist Peter L. Berger who defined the sociological enterprise in primarily “negative” terms, i.e. in the debunking of any utopian, God-like aspirations of man and of his earthly social movements. The sociological task, at least for the early Berger, aided the theological one in that the former helped to contain the evil doings of man in a fallen world. The second model posits the need of Christianity to socially transform the earth, to create, in other words, “God’s kingdom here on earth.” Sociologically, this Calvinist position is represented by the work of the theologian-sociologist Robert N. Bellah, sympathetic as he is to the construction of what may be called a “religious communalism.”

The final and Catholic model posits the existence of a divinely created institution, the Roman Catholic Church, which is “in” the world but not fully “of” it, which serves as the nexus between the other-world and the this-world, which stands both above man and permeates man through the sacraments and which directs his
earthly activity and without whose assistance individual salvation of an eternal, otherworldly nature is hard to attain. Sociologically, this position finds its reflection in the group of Thomistic Catholic sociologists lead by Paul H. Furfey, who argued that a sociologically-informed reason must and can be integrated, although in a subordinate way, with the Catholic faith and that the earthly concern for the reconstruction of the social order was an important, although secondary, feature of the preaching of the Gospel as understood through Catholic tradition.23

While the “Christ above culture” model is still the basic Catholic approach to the relationship of Christ and culture, it has been modified somewhat since Vatican II. This modification is basically along the lines of incorporating certain elements of the Protestant Reformation. Thus, the two other “intermediate” alternatives of Niebuhr have something positive to offer the possibility of Catholic neo-orthodoxy. From the Lutheran model of “paradox” can be taken the awareness of the potential vanity, possible sinfulness, and definite incompleteness that results from a too-heavy emphasis on reason. For instance, Richard J. Neuhaus, in his impressive The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World (1987), tries to bring the Catholic Thomist/synthetic and Lutheran/Two Kingdoms models closer together as follows:

We must never succumb to the love of paradox for the sake of paradox. We should, for instance, press the work of ‘synthesis’ between dissonant truths as far as we possibly can. And here Protestants have a particular responsibility to critically retrieve and resume ambitious synthesizing projects such as that represented by Thomas Aquinas. We have an intellectual duty to do so, which is to say we have a duty to the truth that is in all truths. It is the same duty that forbids us to trim truths into a false fit.24

On the one hand, Neuhaus’ Lutheran perspective should be incorporated into a Catholic neo-orthodoxy as a guard against the possible Catholic development of an intellectual and religious understanding of the world that is too “neat,” too “rationalistic.” On the other hand, and in opposition to Neuhaus who would have Catholicism “Lutheranized,” his model of the “Church and world in paradox” can never be definitive for either the Catholic religion or Catholic scholarship. In the Lutheran model, that gap between reason and faith is too wide, the paradox too incomprehensible, the subjectivism too rampant for it to serve as anything but a corrective - albeit a needed one - to the basic Catholic worldview.

Similarly, the Catholic model since Vatican II has been even more “officially” modified in the direction of the Calvinist “conversionist” model. A concern for social justice is no longer “derivative” of the call of the Gospel, but as the Synod of Bishops 1971 statement, Justice in the World, puts it, it is now a “constitutive” element. Nonetheless, it is important to argue against the interpretation of so-called “progressivist” Catholics who exaggerate the difference between the pre- and post-Vatican II understanding that the Church has of itself. David Tracy, for instance, is wrong when he states that “the mainline Catholic tradition, despite the neo-Scholastic ‘Christ Above Culture’ model of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is a ‘Christ the Transformer of Culture’ model.”25 Similarly, I would argue that Charles Curran, Richard McBrien, and Dennis McCann have overemphasized the “horizontal” this-worldly dimension of the Catholic religion through the priority they give to the Church as “servant.”26 The Tracy, Curran, McBrien, and McCann argument is a very common one made in the Church today but it is one based, as I’ve argued previously, on a very selective misinterpretation of Vatican II and post-Vatican II documents along liberal, social activist lines.27

Today, especially if there is any truth to R.J. Neuhaus’ reading of John Paul II as a thinker somewhat in the “paradoxical” tradition, the Catholic model in the post-Vatican II era is actually a hybrid phenomenon combining the medieval, Calvinist, and Lutheran models.28 It must be stressed that the formal framework of St. Thomas and his “Christ above culture” vision stands at the “cybernetic hierarchy” of this new model. It is one thing to say that the Catholic tradition absorbs what is true in other religions. It is another to assert - and it would be a wrong assertion - to claim that the Catholic tradition as the single fullest expression of Jesus Christ has herself been coopted. This new Catholic model serves as the true “via media” between all the other models. It rejects either a facile acceptance or denial of the world and its institutions. It rejects either overplaying or underplaying the role of faith or reason in religious and human affairs. It rejects either conception of man as fundamentally good or as all being equally depraved. It sees the locus of salvation as otherworldly but as requiring a great deal of this-worldly effort in the name of Christ.
The contemporary battle for the Catholic Church in the United States can be profitably analyzed in light of Niebuhr’s classificatory scheme. The orthodox embrace the classical Thomist model with their neo-orthodox allies accepting the modified Thomistic model. Heterodox forces in the Catholic Church, for their part, primarily embrace either the Christ the transformer or the Christ of culture model or some combination of both. (Because of the conservative nature of the “Christ against culture” and “Two Kingdoms” models that stress human finitude and otherworldliness, the Catholic heterodox have little use for these models.) The Christ the transformer model sees salvation as primarily a this-worldly matter while the Christ of culture model endorses the various cultural and individual reductions analyzed previously that are available in the modern pluralistic context. The latter two models are liberal Protestant in their elevation of the material world and in the acceptance of an unqualified religious individualism.

Another compatible way of conceptualizing the cleavage in the contemporary Catholic Church is to once again employ the typology of religious orientations to the world as discussed by the Protestant historian-theologian, Ernest Troeltsch. For Troeltsch, religion can be manifested in either a “Church-like,” “sect-like,” or “mystical,” i.e., individualistic, stance to the world. The traditional, i.e., medieval Catholic, preference is clearly “Church-like,” while the contemporary Protestant options are either “sect-like” (usually in the form of a world-rejecting fundamentalism) or “mystical” (in the form of a highly individuated religiosity that synthesizes bits and pieces from the outer culture and various religious expressions, that is typical of liberal Protestantism). Put ever so crudely, the official version of contemporary Catholicism has swallowed up the Protestant Reformation without capitulating to it. The “new,” i.e., Vatican II model of the Church places the once outside elements into the old model without destroying the integrity of the old. The present-day Church allows “input” from “sect-like” and “individualistic” orientations, but nonetheless places the Magisterium of the Church in a “command post” of a cybernetic relationship which allows it to control the nature, i.e., the speed, timing, extent, and content, etc. of such input.

Viewed from either Niebuhr’s or Troeltsch’s categories, the contemporary battle for the Catholic Church can be viewed as between the combined forces of Catholic traditionalism and a modified or “neo-orthodox” Catholicism, on the one hand, and those, on the other, for whom recent post-Vatican II modifications are in line with a unilinear evolutionary theory. For the latter, put another way, recent modifications represent only a halfway house to a complete Protestantization, i.e., to a situation in which it is either the Catholic individual or some Catholic sect that stands at the controls of the Catholic cybernetic command post. Either of the latter possibilities is a flagrant violation of the theological and historical understanding that the Catholic Church has of herself.

NEO-ORTHODOXY AS A “VIA MEDIA”

In his opening address to the Fathers at the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII legitimated the idea of an up-dated Catholic neo-orthodoxy when he stated that “the substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.” By this, I take the Pope to have meant that there are many avenues and methods in the defense of a Truth that is, at least in the final analysis, unitary. It can be argued that the position of Pope John XXIII is in tension with, but not in fundamental contradiction with, the earlier positions of Pope Pius IX in his *The Syllabus of Errors* and Pope Pius X in his *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. There is no contradiction in that both John XXIII and Pope Pius IX and Pope Pius X indicate unswerving faith in the legitimacy and authenticity of the divine deposit of faith entrusted to the Catholic Church as the, or at least the principal, church of Christ. There is tension, however, to the degree that the Vatican II position, as contrasted to the pre-Vatican II position, is more open to the various ways by which the absolute truth of the Catholic faith is mediated through different socio-historical eras, philosophies and other secular intellectual disciplines, frames of reference, and other social constructions of reality. In my *Toward the Establishment of Liberal Catholicism in America* (1983), I have precisely argued the latter case, claiming that there is no intrinsic contradiction between simultaneously affirming that the world is socially constructed and that the world and its social constructions can be, have been, and should be
influenced by God and his Church. This position is consistent, in my understanding at least, with that of St. Thomas's understanding of the relationship between changeable social, “human” or “positive” institutions and a, relatively speaking, more constant natural law itself influenced by eternal law. Any difference is to be found in the more “dynamic” nature of my more “modern” theory which highlights the reality that natural law applications can authentically, from the viewpoint of the Magisterium, differ throughout time and space.

CATHOLIC SOCIOLOGY AS A FORM OF CATHOLIC NEO-ORTHODOX THINKING

Theology of Vatican II and the neo-orthodox idea that Catholic truth is necessarily socially and individually mediated has provided the impetus for my recent attempts to resurrect the idea of Catholic sociology, or more accurately, Catholic sociologies. At its simplest, a “Catholic Sociology” is one that, minimally, consciously relates to maximally, integrates Catholic theology/philosophy with sociological analysis.

Many of the nineteenth century founding figures of sociology in Europe were either atheists or agnostics; accepting a “straight-line” evolutionary schema, they saw religion, and especially Catholicism, as a backward anomaly that would serve no positive function in the modern world. Moreover, for many - such as the founder of sociology himself, Auguste Comte - sociology would become, in essence, the new “scientific” religion of humanity. The situation at the turn of the century in the United States was slightly different; many of the American founding figures were religiously inspired but by a liberal Protestant perspective termed the “Social Gospel.” From the latter perspective, sociology was to be the vehicle through which “God's Kingdom here on earth” would be instituted. From the pre-Vatican II perspective, both a European and American sociology were viewed - not indefensibly, to say the least - with distrust to, at worst, outright hostility. The 1864 proclamation of Pope Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors*, which declared that “modern civilization as recently introduced” ought to be opposed, or at least ignored, represented, quintessentially at the time, the negative attitude of an official Catholicism to all things modern, especially to that most “modern” way of interpreting social reality, i.e., sociology.

The exception to the Catholic opposition to sociology existed as a small part of the intellectual compo-

There are, in reality, as many “Catholic sociologies” as there are Catholic and sociological subtraditions that can be cross-cut and related/integrated with each other. They key, from this author’s perspective, that differentiates a legitimate from illegitimate “Catholic sociology” is the question of whether or not the Catholic faith, as protected, and guided by the Magisterium of the Church, is granted a cybernetically superordinate “control” position in the overall research enterprise.

In general, a cybernetic model involves a two-level flow of downward “control” and an upward “feedback.” In the case of any specific Catholic sociology, a primarily “deductive” Catholicism and a primarily “inductive” sociology are in continuing conversation with each other, compartmentalized in a three-stage sequence yet integrated overall in the cybernetic process. At the head of the cybernetic hierarchy of a Catholic sociology is a general attachment to some legitimate subtradition of Catholicism (e.g. Augustinian, Thomistic, Franciscan,
etc.) that can be modified or mediated by an influence from the bottom upward through some “objective,” inductive sociological analysis. One’s Catholic and sociological commitments are cybernetically related such that Catholicism “controls” the choice of social research problems and provides a body of underlying assumptions and theoretical ideas and concepts (e.g. “natural law,” “subsidiarity,” “proportionality,” a “human nature” not completely malleable or plastic, mankind as having both spiritual and material needs with the former as more important, salvation as ultimately an “otherworldly” reality, etc.) that orient one to the study of a particular problem while the sociological analysis provides “feedback” in the sense of an awareness that empirical reality is mediated through a host of social factors (e.g. culture, class, race, sex, etc.). The three stage process is completed as Catholicism provides, finally, interpretive tools for analyzing the ethical implications of, and for formulating possible social policy in response to, the more narrowly defined sociological analysis.

A brief example of how such a Catholic sociological cybernetic model operates will be provided. A Catholic sociologist would, by virtue of his/her allegiance to the tradition of social Catholicism, be interested in studying the effectiveness of formal education in terms of both skills development and character development. (Conversely, it is hard to imagine a Catholic sociologist intent on studying any “micro” sociological phenomenon devoid of “macro” implications such as the study of symbolic communication between students in a school lunchroom.) In this first step of the cybernetic process, the stock of knowledge of the Catholic sociologist provides him/her with, among many other conceptual tools, the basic Catholic principle of “subsidiarity” as propounded by Pope Pius XI in Quadragesimo Anno (1931).

The principle of subsidiarity asserts, in short, that all social functions should be performed by the most efficient and the least inclusive unit possible. If the educational function of, for example, skills development can be better handled in the school and not in the family, then the school should be in charge of such training. If the moral education of the child can best be performed by the family, then the family and not the school should be in charge. If, in more modern contexts the neighborhood can better handle the educational functions than can larger regional agencies, then the former should be allocated the task. If a certain problem can best be handled at the more inclusive federal level (e.g. protection of the civil rights of minorities), then it becomes a federalist function. The concept of “subsidiarity,” in short, leads the “Catholic sociologist” in the first step of this particular investigation.

The second stage of the cybernetic process entails the “objective” analysis of determining under just what circumstances will skills education and moral education be best executed. It is important to note here that the quest for objectivity and the admission that values - in this case, “Catholic” values - influence one’s factual understanding of social reality are not contradictory. The value or conception of “subsidiarity” serves the quest for objectivity in the sense that it leads or “opens up” the sociologist to whatever truth is inherent in the idea. At the same time, the “Catholic sociologist” has an obligation to acknowledge that his/her specifically Catholic focus may deny him/her the insight afforded by, for example and in contrast, a “Marxist” analysis positing education as merely part of the societal “superstructure” generating a “false consciousness,” a socialist/federalist analysis emphasizing the virtues of uniformity and centralization, and a social Darwinist analysis suggesting the reality and desirability of an individualistic “survival of the fittest.” The “Catholic sociologist” has the obligation of comparing his/her interpretation of the effectiveness of the educational system under given situations with that of the others, of determining why and how the various interpretations differ, and of deciding honestly if his/her Catholic perspective can, in an intellectually adequate and thorough way, respond to the intellectual criticisms of the other perspectives. In the event that the “Catholic Sociologist” determines that he/she cannot, with integrity, argue the superiority of the Catholic cognitive claims, there is the obligation to make this discrepancy known publicly and to then defer to the ultimate judgement of the Magisterium.

In the more likely event that the cognitive discrepancies in analysis can be satisfactorily explained by the Catholic sociologist, the third step of the cybernetic process starts. On the completion of the second step of the “sociological investigation” in which objectivity as best as humanly possible has been pursued, the Catholic sociologist becomes, once again, more obviously “Catholic,” noting this or that ethical implication and arguing that some particular social policy be pursued and implemented. It is important to stress that the social policy that is being advocated can be called “a” but not “the” Catholic position. The point is, of course, that there is a wide range of potential policy solutions that can be con-
sistent with Catholicism just as there will be some solutions that clearly fall outside of the scope of an authentic Catholic vision. It is also important to note that the cybernetic model just outlined imposes bounds on the nature and extent of the integration between the roles of Catholic and sociologist. The second stage of the cybernetic process is, by far and away, the most complicated for the Catholic sociologist. On the one hand, he/she must bracket, as best as one can, considerations of commitment to Catholicism when involved in the more routine tasks of studying empirical reality (questionnaire construction, interviewing, tabulation of data, etc.). On the other hand, the Catholic sociologist is simultaneously aware that his/her research is being led by Catholic postulates and that the research of secular colleagues on the very same data and phenomena is being led by postulates that can possibly carry with them atheistic, agnostic, materialistic, etc. implications. All of this must be taken into account in the Catholic sociologist’s attempt to arrive at the truth of the investigation. Finally, when carrying over the findings of his/her research in the attempt to create Catholic social policy, the Catholic sociologist must be wary about bringing in assumptions that are implicitly secularistic or have secularizing implications. The cybernetic relationship outlined above views Catholicism and sociology as neither autonomous from each other nor directly dependent on each other; they are interdependent spheres of reality with the former being the more diffuse, inclusive, and ultimate attachment.

THE PROMISE OF AVERY DULLES AS A NEO-ORTHODOX THINKER

Perhaps the single greatest scholar whose work potentially shares an affinity with an up-dated Catholic neo-orthodoxy is that of the Catholic theologian, Avery Dulles, S.J. Throughout his vast published intellectual corpus, Dulles provides fascinating historically grounded and comparative typologies of the various elements of the Church and forms by which it - defined most inclusively to include Protestantism but with a major focus on Catholicism - has manifested itself throughout the ages. On the one hand, the scholarship of Dulles is consistent with an updated neo-orthodoxy in that it makes excellent use of, in an interdisciplinary way, the various secular intellectual disciplines to understand and promote the Catholic tradition. On the other hand, Dulles is only “potentially” a neo-orthodox thinker given certain criticisms of his work. Most importantly, Dulles fails to place the “institutional” model of the Catholic Church in a superordinate position vis-a-vis other possible ways of understanding the Church. Simply put, Dulles goes too far in acknowledging the limitations of the institutional Church and its anchor and focal point, the Magisterium or, conversely put, he does not go far enough in acknowledging the significantly greater limitations of any single individual non-Magisterial interpretation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, Dulles is correct in acknowledging 1) that the Roman Catholic Church does not exhaust the meaning of the Church of Christ and 2) that the Church of Christ is, in part, an “invisible” reality incapable of being completely conceptualized and totally understood by mankind. Put another way, one can accept a kind of “concentric zone” theory that logically argues that 1) there is the ultimate Truth which is Jesus Christ; 2) there is the Church of Christ; 3) there is the fullest expression of the Church of Christ which is the Roman Catholic Church; and 4) there is the most accurate interpreter and guardian of Roman Catholicism in the form of its Magisterium. For Dulles, furthermore, the net difference between the “invisible” Truth of Christ incapable of being assimilated by a finite mankind and the “visible” Truth of Christ as captured and concretized by the Magisterium is seen, following the terminology of Vatican II, as “mystery.” Similarly, Richard J. Neuhaus, following his own Lutheran “two kingdoms” model, would refer to the “mysterious” by another label, that of the “paradoxical.” Given that no human agency, even that of the Magisterium in a special relationship with the Holy Spirit, can perfectly interpret the Christian message, the question becomes, then, from the logic of Dulles, “who interprets the mystery of paradox?” Given his own Lutheran perspective which exaggerates the amount of mystery and paradox there is in the universe and which is constitutionally anti-institutional and antinomian in nature, the locus of authority for Neuhaus is, predictably enough, the “individual.” This explains the unsatisfactoriness from an orthodox Catholic perspective of Neuhaus’ understanding of the Magisterium and of the need for some supra-individual authority in his otherwise important treatise, The Catholic Moment. On the other hand, however, what is surprising and disappointing is the failure of the Catholic theologian, Dulles, to acknowledge that, for Catholics at
least, “when in individual doubt, go with the understanding and interpretation of the Magisterium.” The best that Dulles can offer here is a conceptually unclear and vague call for a kind of triangularization in terms of authority between Magisterium, theologians, prophets, and other components of the “people of God.” The major criticism here is not so much that Dulles advocates a model with too many chiefs and not enough Indians but a model in which there is no clear ultimate and chief authority. For Dulles to argue as he does that the various components of the people of God dialectically influence each other does not suffice; only a “cybernetic” model can prevent utter chaos from reigning within the Church. The neo-orthodox model offered in this essay does, indeed, allow for many chiefs but only for one ultimate authority, the Pope and those Bishops in loyal communion with him. On the one hand, one can grant to Dulles and Neuhaus that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is always interpreted in a culturally conditioned manner. On the other hand, Roman Catholics should have little trouble in deciding the issue of the ultimate superiority of interpretations of the Gospel, between that of any single individual interpretation - whether it be the Gospel of a Richard John Neuhaus, a Charles Curran, or an Avery Dulles and that of the Magisterium. That the latter is the correct Catholic choice can be defended theologically in light of the special relationship existing between the Holy Spirit and the Bishops as propounded in both Scripture and tradition and social-scientifically on the grounds that the recorded, protected, and developed insights of a 2,000 year old traditional theological vehicle better protects against culturally determined thought vis-a-vis the greater frailty, finiteness, and ethnocentrism of any one individual trapped within a particular moment in time and space. The excessive emphasis on the Church as “mystery,” “invisible” reality, and “paradox” and the almost complete obliteration of any distinction between the “sacred” and the “profane” argued for by Dulles that legitimates a decentralization of authority within the Catholic Church is consistent with what Thomas Sowell would call an “unconstrained” vision of mankind. This is a utopian model that posits the possibility of significant progress for both mankind, society, and Church in the future short of the second coming of the Lord and is opposed to a more “constrained” or “classical” understanding that underscores the constant limitations of both mankind and society across time and space and the corresponding need for an eternally vigilant Church authority to set appropriately high and stem religious and moral standards for human thought and conduct. There are other criticisms of the work of Dulles that complicate and compliment the aforementioned major criticism. They all have to deal with the ideal-typical analyses of Dulles. First of all, in Dulles’ hands, this mode of analysis has a tendency to produce an almost “formless” or “disembodied” Catholicity. In his attempt to provide balance and throw an intellectual rope around an admittedly complex picture, Dulles seemingly submerges the Catholic portrait into the background landscape, religious and otherwise. His position, likewise, that all of his ideal-typical “models” of the Church are dialectically related to each other similarly avoids the necessary question of what is definitive and constitutive of the faith. His “provisionality,” in other words, borders on religious paralysis. His attempt to incorporate the more Protestant models of “community,” “herald,” and “servant” seemingly co-opt the more Catholic models of “institution” and “sacrament.” Relatedly, one can question the utility of separating into two types the “institutional” and “sacramental” components of the Catholic Church. This leads to the false, and Protestant, bias which sees institutions as opposed to, by very definition, a vivifying presence of God and exaggerates the degree, conversely, of the authenticity of any individualized and unmediated religiosity.

The following brief excursus on Dulles’ work starts with his The Dimensions of the Church (1967) published almost immediately after the conclusion of Vatican II. Dulles initiates his investigation with a question and then follows with a short and general answer: “Let us ask ourselves what the true dimensions of the Church are. We shall find it a much larger and more inclusive reality than most of us have been accustomed to imagine.” Dulles downplays the historic role given to reason in the Catholic tradition and sounds almost Lutheran when he states that: “What is most distinctive of the Church, therefore, is not subject to human verification but accessible only to the eyes of faith. We might expect as much if the Church is by nature a mystery.” Dulles similarly underemphasizes the divine side of the Church when he argues that “the theology of Vatican II is, on the whole, concrete and historical rather than abstract and metaphysical. Accordingly, the Council prefers to speak of the Church not as the bare essence of ‘what Christ insti-
tuted’ but rather as what results when men of flesh and blood gather in such an institution.”38 Dulles affirms the asymmetry between the concepts of the “Church of Christ” and the “Roman Catholic Church” as follows:

Until Vatican II, most Catholics were content to say that the Church of Christ is the Roman Catholic Church, and that it includes only those who are joined to it by the triple bond of creed, code, and cult specified in Bellarmine’s definition. According to this view, no one would be in the Church of Christ unless he professed the Catholic faith, was subject to the Roman pontiff, and had access to the sacraments.39

After approvingly quoting the German exegete, Heinrich Schlier, Dulles offers his own understanding of the almost isomorphic relationship between “sacred” and “profane” and “Church” and “universe”:

So close are the relations between the Church and the world that it seems hardly possible to make a sharp distinction between their goals. If all mankind were created for salvation, and salvation means an authentic fellowship of men in the Body of Christ, the Church really exists to remind the world of its own nature and to help achieve itself.40

After providing readers with numerous examples of ideas that are heterodox in either their emphasis or lack of subordination to the Magisterium, Dulles typically qualifies himself as follows:

It would be fatal to ignore either the institutional Church or the mystical Church, either the human Church or that which is God. It would be disastrous to divide or separate what God has bound together.41

Unfortunately, Avery Dulles, through the artificial distinctions made in his “ideal-typical” analysis, does “divide or separate what God has bound together,” with at least partially disastrous results. This reality can be seen clearly in Dulles’ next major work, The Survival of Dogma (1971).42 In this work, he argues not only for a pluralization of authentic authorities within the Catholic Church - which in and by itself is acceptable - but refuses to grant the Magisterium any special or privileged status among the various other authorities. On the one hand, Dulles states boldly: “The official Magisterium is only one of the many elements in the total witness of the Church.”43 On the other hand, Dulles is clearly correct when he argues that:

Christianity recognizes only one absolute authority - that of God himself. This means that all the secondary authorities are subject to criticism and correction. Every created channel that manifests God and brings men to him is capable also of misleading men and turning them away from God.44

For Dulles:

In most Christian bodies, several types of authority exist concurrently. On the one hand, there is the juridical and public authority of the highest officers - whether pope, bishops, or ruling bodies, such as assemblies, synods, and councils. These officials make their authority felt, normally by issuing documents, which are regarded as normative for the group. On the other hand, there are private authorities, which in their own way are no less important than the officials. Under this heading one would have to include, first, scholars, who speak on the basis of their research and professional competence. Secondly, there are “charismatic persons” who seem to be endowed with a more than common measure of the true Christian spirit. Like the prophets of old, these charismatics often feel impelled to criticize the officials and scholars, to rebuke them for their infidelity and insensitivity. Finally, there is the authority of consensus. In the Church, public opinion is definitely a force to be reckoned with, especially in the democratic age.45

The benefit of “this plurality of authentic Christian sources,” for Dulles, is that it:

protects the believer from being crushed by the weight of any single authority; it restrains any one organ from so imposing itself as to eliminate what the others have to say. It provides a margin of liberty within which each individual can feel encouraged to make his own distinctive contribution, to understand the faith in a way proper to himself. And at the same time it provides the Church as a whole with the suppleness it needs to operate in different parts of the globe and in a rapidly changing world.46
confusion in the Church? It is a far too cheery, optimistic, and naive one:

Some, discontented with the intellectual untidiness generated by the recognition of such diverse authorities, seek to reduce everything to unity by arbitrarily exalting one authority above all the others . . . As against all such simplistic solutions, we should prefer to say that the ‘word of God’ is best heard when one maintains a certain critical distance from any given expression of that word. By holding a multitude of irreducibly distinct articulations in balance, one can best position himself to hear what God may be saying here and now. To recognize the historically conditioned character of every expression of faith is not to succumb to historical relativity, but rather to escape imprisonment within the relativities of any particular time and place. Unless relativity is recognized for what it is, it cannot be transcended. 47

Unfortunately, Dulles does not indicate how, in a babble of conflicting and equally legitimate voices, relativity can be transcended nor does he point out the disastrous consequences for the Church of an unnavigated swim in the “fiery brook of relativity.” As is typical of Dulles, he carefully hedges his bets, giving ad hoc and after-the-fact legitimacy to the central concept of the Magisterium. Dulles admits, for instance, that:

notwithstanding all the merits of pluralism, we must, I think, acknowledge that it has its limits and dangers. If the word of God cannot be totally identified with any particular expression, it by no means follows that every human attitude and expression is consonant with the gospel of Christ ... Thus it remains an important task of ecclesiastical authority to see to it that . . . the ongoing transformations of Christian life do not undermine the apostolicity and catholic unity essential to the Church. 48

Surprisingly, given his previously enunciated logic, Dulles can also simply state that “only the bearers of the official Magisterium can formulate judgements in the authoritative way. They may, of course, accept and approve the work of private theologians, but when they do so it is they - not the theologians - who give official status to the theories they approve.” 49 Thus can one, occasionally, “tease out of” Dulles a position not far afield from the cybernetic one outlined in this essay.

The severe limitations and consequences of Dulles’ most obvious understanding of pluralism can be seen through an examination of his next work, the immensely popular and influential, Models of the Church (1974). 50 In this work, Dulles argues that the Church has historically presented to the world five major ecclesiastical models: “institutional,” “mystical communion,” “sacramental,” “herald,” and “servant.” Dulles argues, correctly I think, that a full-bodied and rich Catholicism must utilize all five models. It is clear, however, that Dulles refuses to grant any one of these five models a superordinate position. He states that:

The peculiarity of models . . . is that we cannot integrate them into a single synthetic vision on the level of articulate, categorical thought. In order to do justice to the various aspects of the Church, as a complex reality, we must work simultaneously with different models. By a kind of mental juggling act, we have to keep several models in the air at once. 51

Dulles admirably analyzes the social context under which any one respective model gains societal plausibility or, conversely, appears as obsolete. He provides, for the most part, a balanced assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each model. This book, as with those previously analyzed, straddles the line, as this reviewer sees it, between a contemporary authentic Catholic neoorthodox approach and a contemporary heterodox one - albeit an exceedingly sophisticated and nuanced version of the latter. Consistent with the former approach, Dulles is authentically attached to, enormously knowledgeable about, and sympathetic (for the most part) toward the Catholic tradition. Consistent with the former, his approach to defending and propounding the faith has consistently been one that utilizes the best that objective historical, humanistic, social-scientific, and theological perspectives can offer. Yet this work fails to fully fall within the parameters of a Catholic neoorthodoxy - as defined in this paper - because of its refusal to grant the Magisterium a cybernetically superordinate position in the Catholic tradition. Similar to Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s criticism of contemporary biblical exegesis to the
effect that it approaches liqui-dating the reality of the
Bible itself, Dulles’ analy-sis comes close to liquidat-
ing the Catholic tradition itself. Dulles’ discussion of the institutional model in Models of the Church is more analytical than empirical; one can analyze the institu-tional Church in a purely sociological sense only qua secular sociologist. As my previous discussion of what it means to be a “Catholic sociologist” has argued, any empirical analysis of the Catholic Church must cyber-netically relate Catholic theological considerations (e.g. Magisterium, grace, charism, etc.) with more narrowly secular sociological concepts (e.g. power, social control, socialization, etc.) in order to avoid the sin of sociologi-cal/historical reductionism.

As Dulles would note in a latter work, A Church to Believe In (1983), “of all the paradigms considered, only the first - the institutional - corresponds to the common Roman Catholic experience of Church ...” In his Models of the Church, he states, however, that “one of the five models, I believe, cannot properly be taken as primary - and this is the institutional model.” For Dulles, it is the case that:

There is something of a consensus today that the innermost reality of the Church - the most impor-tant constituent of its being - is the divine self-gift. The Church is a union or communion of men with one another through the grace of Christ. Al-though this communion manifests itself in sacra-
mental and juridical structures, at the heart of the Church one finds mystery.

Dulles is here to be criticized on several counts, all essentially intertwined. First of all, he seems intent to side-step or ignore what Vatican II clearly enunciated about the guardian role and ultimate authority of the Pope and Bishops in constituting the Church’s Magis-
terium. As Lumen Gentium, No. 22, puts it, “The order of Bishops is the succession to the college of the apostles in teaching authority (magisterio) and pastoral rule.” Secondly, he reads Vatican II as too much opposed to Pope Pius XII’s Mystici Corporis (1943) when the latter asserted that “there can, then, be no real opposition or conflict between the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit and the juridical commission which the rules and teachers (of the Church) have received from Christ. Like body and soul in us, they complement and perfect each other, and have their source in our one Redeemer.” Thirdly, Dulles is far too quick to grant equal status to the es-
entially Protestant models of “herald,” “community,” and “servant” vis-a-vis the constitu-tively Catholic mod-
els of “institution” and “sacrament.” The former models can be grafted into the Catholic tradition but cannot co-opt it. Fourth, his distinction between the “institutional” model as primarily a sociological reality and the “sacra-
mental” model as primarily a theological reality is a false one; rather, following both Pope Pius XII in Mystici Cor-
poris (1943) and Hans Urs von Balthasar in Church and World (1967), they are aspects of the same reality. Von Balthasar speaks here correctly of the Church hierarchy as “crystalized love.” One can, of course, and at the same time, acknowledge that the “institutional-sacramental” model of the Church may veer off either toward an “in-
stitutional” or “sacramental” direction during certain sociohistorical periods and for whatever theological and sociological reasons. The point, however, is that these re-
spective directions are oriented to endpoints on the same continuum. Fifthly, Dulles can be criticized for failing to realize that a Church defined primarily as “mystery,” as “paradox,” or as “invisible reality” would quickly, if unintentionally, turn into, referring once again to H.R. Neibuhr’s categories, a “Christ of culture” Church that mirrors the secular, this-worldly, materialistic environ-
ment. Given his essentially “unconstrained” vision, that tends to collapse the “sacred” - “profane” dichotomy, that is overly optimistic short of the second coming of the Lord, and that doesn’t fully appreciate the human ten-
dency to fall toward sin, Dulles fails to realize the ab-
solute necessity of the Magisterium of the Church pro-
viding guidelines for social and individual thought and action.

It is crucial to reassert here that an up-dated neo-
orthodoxy, as defined here, does respect what the Church teaches about “mystery,” i.e., that the Church must always be open to ever greater exploration. And such exploration means an openness both to input from the Catholic laity and from the non-Catholic surrounding world.
Magisterium must have the “final say” or, again put cybernetically, must control the content, flow, and tempo of such input if the Church is not to drown in this “mystery.”

Dulles’ next major work, The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation (1977), apparently does move slightly in the direction of protecting the Church from drowning in the religious and secular seas of “mystery.” While still arguing that “reform must, I contend, be accepted more radically than in the past,” he follows almost immediately:

Yet reform must not be allowed to introduce ideas and practices foreign to the true spirit of Catholicism. Whatever is taken in from the outside must be assessed by this criterion: Does it make the Church more than previously a society of faith, of hope, and of love? In other words, does it make the Church more the Church? ... I call attention to the danger that the Church might become so politicized or psychologized as to lose sight of the transcendent or divine dimension of its own mission ... Let it not become a therapeutic society, a political party, or even a public interest group.

Only three years after arguing that the “institutional” model of the Church was the least important of his five models, Dulles states that:

In the anti-institutionalism of the postconciliar years, secular theologians were convinced that they had rediscovered the true mission of the Church. I would argue, on the contrary, that their view of the Church was not only practically suicidal - since it seriously undermined devotion to the Church - but theologically false.

While not repudiating his previously enunciated conception of a plurality of irreducible authorities within the Church that is defined primarily as mystery, Dulles nonetheless seems to back off somewhat from his previously argued sharp distinction between the “institutional” and “sacramental” models of the Church:

The Catholic Church, I submit, has a rightful place in the modern world if, or rather because, it continues to bear witness to its own tradition of faith and builds upon its own sacramental, priestly, and hierarchical heritage. What is at stake here is the fundamental concept of the Church. The Church, as I have already contended, is essentially a mystery of grace, a wonderful encounter between the divine and the human. Even in its visible structures, the Church is not a mere organization to be judged on the grounds of efficiency, but a sacrament of God’s saving deed in Jesus Christ. From this it follows, in my judgement, that the Church’s forms of speech and life, and indeed its entire corporate existence, must be such as to mediate a vital communion with Christ the Lord.

Where Dulles had previously seen himself, in the immediate post-conciliar period, as a “progressive,” he now sees himself as neither liberal nor conservative. Speaking of his The Resilient Church (1977) he argues:

A twofold critique runs through the following pages - the first directed against those conservatives who through fear or complacency balk at adapting the doctrines and institutions of the Church to the times in which we live; the second, against those liberals whose programs of adaptation are based on an uncritical acceptance of the norms and slogans of western secularist ideologies. My positions cannot easily be labeled as either conservative or liberal, though on some points I am in sympathy with each of these tendencies. My aim is to combine, as far as possible, the daring of the liberal with the caution of the conservative, the openness of the liberal with the fidelity of the conservative.

Given the obvious intellectual nonsense and religious flaccidity brought on by the selective misinterpretation of Vatican II theology by self-proclaimed progressives in the decade after the Council, it is no surprise that Dulles has moved “to the right.” He maintains this newly acquired “centrist” position, for instance, in his next work of importance, A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom (1983). In the second chapter, “Institution and Charism In the Church,” Dulles denies that “charisma” and “institution” or “spirit” and “structure” stand in a zero-sum relationship to each other:

A sacrament, in the Catholic theological tradition, has two aspects: it is a sign of present grace and a symbolic cause or transmission of grace. The Church as a whole is a sign of Christ and his grace. The institutional features of the Church - such as its apostolic ministry, its baptism, its eucharistic worship, its rites of absolution, as well as its Scriptures and creedal formulations - externally signify what the Church represents and effects in
the world. The institutional in the Church, therefore, is never merely institutional. It is essentially linked to the presence and promise of grace. It is misleading to assert that ecclesiastical institutions are a substitute for the absent Spirit. They may be, should be, and normally are to some extent, symbolic manifestations of the present Spirit, for the risen Lord has promised to be present with his disciples to the end of the age (Mt 28:20).  

Very importantly, Dulles here sees a special role for the Magisterium, vis-a-vis the plurality of other charisms in the Church that is not so different from the cybernetic model advocated in this essay. For Dulles:  

The pastoral office, charismatically exercised, fosters other charisms in the Church while correcting their deviations. The special charism of the pastoral office is not to replace or diminish other charisms but to bring them to their fullest efficacy. This involved several distinct functions. First, the pastoral office must authenticate genuine charisms and distinguish them from false charisms . . . Second, hierarchical leaders have the function of stimulating and encouraging the charisms ... Third, the pastors must direct the charisms according to the norm of apostolic faith and thus bring them into subjection to the law of the cross ... Finally, office, as a kind of general charisma, has the responsibility of coordinating all the particular charisms so that they may better achieve the goal of building up the total body of Christ. The pastoral office prevents the prior unity of the Church from being fragmented by the free responses of the enthusiasts, and reminds the spiritually gifted of their duty to obey the one Lord of the Church. The characteristic temptation of the free charismatic is to follow the momentary impulses arising out of transitory local situation, without sufficient regard for the established order and for universal, long-term need. The pastoral office therefore integrates the possibly distorted self-sufficiency of the particular charisms into the greater unity of ecclesiastical love.  

Dulles, again with his usual qualifications, reasserts the special guardian function of the Magisterium:  

It is often said that the last word lies with the office-holders, since it is their function to discern between true and false charisms - a point made more than once in the Constitution of the Church. The presumption does lie with the hierarchy, but the presumption cannot be absolutized... Thus there is no ultimate juridical solution to collisions between spiritually gifted reformers and conscientious defenders of the accepted order. The Church is not a totalitarian system in which disagreement can be ended by simple fiat.

In another major work published in 1983, Models of Revelation, Dulles analyzes the five major methods by which revelation, that is, the truth of and about God as presented in Scripture and through the teaching of the Church, has been approached in the Christian tradition. Utilizing the same kind of “ideal-typical” analysis of his previous Models of the Church, he proposes the five models of revelation of, respectively, “doctrine,” “history,” “inner-experience,” “dialectical presence,” and “new awareness.” Similar to his 1974 understanding of the “institutional” model, Dulles is too harsh in his understanding of the “revelation as doctrine” model which, translated into the Catholic situation, means a criticism of Catholic neo-Scholastic thought with its stress on a body of “propositional truths” contained in Scripture and in Church tradition as propounded by the Magisterium. Supernatural revelation, in this model, is given in the form of words having a clear propositional content. Assent to such propositions, Dulles points out, is not considered blindly but is viewed as a reasonable act resting on external signs of credibility. Dulles’ primary criticism of the propositional model is that the “propositional model rests on an objectifying theory of knowledge that is widely questioned in our time. In communications, propositions play a rather modest part.” He continues:  

If one admits that the definitions cannot be accepted at face value, but are subject to reinterpretation, one had already abandoned the objectivist concept of truth that underlies the propositional model. Contemporary hermeneutics, without necessarily abandoning every kind of inerrancy or infallibility, seeks to achieve fidelity to the given without rigid adherence to the approved verbal-conceptual formulations.  

According to Dulles, revelation can best be approached through his method or “symbolic mediation” or “symbolic realism.” For Dulles, “revelation never occurs in a purely interior experience or an unmediated encounter with God. It is always mediated through symbol - that is to say, through an externally perceived sign that works mysteriously on the human consciousness so as to suggest more than it can clearly describe or define.”
Dulles argues that his own theory of symbolic mediation or symbolic realism:

do not deprive revelation of its clarity and stability. The symbols are not indefinitely pliable. It is possible to submit oneself to their power, rather than wresting the symbols to one’s purposes. The Christian symbols, taken in the entire network that forms their context, and interpreted in the living community of faith, give secure directives for thought and conduct. Interpreted against the background of the symbols and of Christian life, certain conceptual formulations can be put forward as bearing the authority of revelation.74

On the one hand, Dulles is, again, consistent with the spirit of neo-orthodoxy in that he is attempting to utilize the fruits of objective philosophical and linguistic research to elucidate and make real the faith of the Catholic religion. One can certainly argue for the reality and usefulness of his nuanced “symbolic” approach which doesn’t deny the “realism” and “absoluteness” of the truth claims of Catholicism. Furthermore, one can argue that it is the appropriate duty of theologians, both clerical and lay, to suggest and make public various intelligent and plausible interpretations of the Faith through the use of such a symbolic analysis. On the other hand, however, Dulles again shows too facile an acceptance of the power of individual human reason and of the ability of individuals to make the right decisions and lead the holy life unaided by the supernatural power of the Magisterium. He also fails to sufficiently address the “short-term” issue of who has the ultimate right and authority to define what are orthodox and heterodox interpretations of the faith at any specific moment in time and space. While it is true that the Holy Spirit informs both Magisterium and Catholic individual, it is clear that the Catholic Church has historically and constitutively - up to and including the present - claimed a special “guardian” role in the protection of the faith. Put another way, it is possible to agree with Dulles’ criticisms of the limitations of the “propositional model” of revelation and still be willing to provisionally submit to contemporary Catholic doctrinal truth on grounds of faith, tradition, pragmatic reasoning, and practical necessity. Again, Dulles overstates the distinction between the Church as “hierarchy” and as “mystery,” as the generator of “objective,” propositional truth and as the arena for competing, more subjective truths. A cybernetic model, to the contrary, includes all such elements.

In the last major volume of his to be considered, *The Catholicity of the Church* (1985), Dulles explores four facets of Catholicity which he labels those of “height,” “depth,” “breadth,” and “length.”75 This most recent book of his, while still stopping short of accepting something equivalent to a cybernetic approach, comes closest to being classified as neo-orthodox. In this work, he speaks in a more positive fashion of Catholic Christanity’s “reliance on institutional or sacramental structures to mediate the truth and grace of Christ.”76

Such structures, in the Catholic view, are necessary to sustain all four of the dimensions of Catholicity: the height, because the divine presence must be continually mediated in order that God’s gift in Christ be made accessible; the depth, because the fruits of Christ’s redemptive action must be applied to the human and the cosmic; the breadth, because without such structures the world-wide Church would break apart; and the length, because these structures are needed to preserve continuity amid change. Without visible mediations even the spiritual aspects of redemption would be comprised by being isolated from the material. The institutional, according to the Catholic view, is not just tolerated as a necessary evil; it is positively cultivated as having intrinsic religious value.77

Speaking more specifically of the Church’s Magisterium, Dulles states:

Catholic Christianity, with its doctrine of the apostolic succession, attributes to the hierarchy, and those commissioned or approved by them, a genuine teaching authority, technically called “Magisterium.” The faithful may and must presume that when the bishops define the faith, as they can do by their corporate action, they are trustworthy witnesses.78

Dulles, characteristically notes, however, that “there are limits to hierarchical authority.”79 In this regard, Dulles accepts Cardinal John Henry Newman’s argument in his *Via Media* (1877) that the Church inherits from Christ three distinct offices, the priestly, the prophetic, and the royal. For Dulles, “the overall performance of the Church results from a continual interaction of the three offices, whose bearers, having different abilities and concerns, cooperate and occasionally check one another’s excesses ... The royal power of the pastors, Newman concluded, must function in tension with the unofficial authority of saints and scholars, who in turn stand in some tension with one another.”80
The issue, at this point, that must be raised is the question of whether Dulles sees the pluralistic components of the Church as equal in authority or whether he grants the Magisterium a cybernetically superordinate position. Dulles’ response, I argue, is quite compatible with neo-orthodoxy in that he argues for the absolute necessity of input from the non-magisterial elements of the Church but sees the latter’s role as one “to recognize, encourage, coordinate, and judge the gifts and initiatives of others.” The complete text is as follows:

The Church is greatly blessed by her sacramental structures, which mediate to her members the fullness of God’s gift in Christ. But these structures must be rightly used. They are intended to help the faithful develop their personal powers and gifts, whether of prayer, of understanding, or of action. If all initiative is left to the highest office-holders – the bishops - not even they can function well. Their proper role is not to initiate all action, but rather to recognize, encourage, coordinate, and judge the gifts and initiatives of others. Where the community is inert, the hierarchy becomes paralyzed. Having no material on which to work, it is forced to be idle or to assume functions not properly its own.81

Finally, mention should be made of an essay of Avery Dulles entitled “Community of Disciples as a Model of the Church” which was published in 1986.82 In this essay, Dulles, building on Chapter One of his previously referred to A Church to Believe In (1983), offers yet a sixth model of the Church, i.e., the “community of disciples,” that, in Richard McBrien’s words, “retrieves and synthesizes the positive features of the other five models without carrying forward their respective liabilities.”83 This model is basically a variation of the more sect-like, Christ against-culture, and Protestant “mystical communion” one presented in Models of the Church and hence is of no particular interest to an up-dated Catholic neo-orthodoxy. Brief mention can, however, be made of this reviewer’s belief that Dulles’ advocacy of this model is a reflection of the “dialectical” (as compared to “organ-ic”) theory of social change that he embraces.84 The acceptance of such “dialectical” thinking, given the heavy secularist dominance of the present age forces Dulles to accept an understanding of the Catholic Church that woefully neglects its potential ability to influence the outer society and to serve, referring to a term coined by Peter Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, as an effective “mediating structure” between God and society and God and man. What is, however, of interest in the present attempt to construct an up-dated neo-orthodoxy is Dulles admission in this essay that in 1974, “writing in a moment in our history when institutions of all kinds were under hostile scrutiny, I may have been somewhat too severe on the institutional model.”85 Dulles continues:

Pastoral leadership, as we know from the New Testament and from Christian tradition, involves something more than the formal authority of office - i.e., the mere fact of being duly installed. Those selected for pastoral office are previously judged to have both the vocation and the aptitude, and if they are ordained they receive in addition the grace of the sacrament. They therefore possess not only the juridical authority of office but personal and charismatic authority.86

It is interesting to speculate that the movement in Dulles’ thought from “progressive” to “moderate” to now, perhaps, something approaching “neo-orthodoxy” is the result of Dulles’ acknowledgement of the rotten religious fruit borne by those who have misused the theology of Vatican II. Regardless of this speculation, it could very well be the case that Avery Dulles is now prepared to accept the mantel and responsibility of becoming the pre-eminent Catholic neo-orthodox thinker of the day.

THE PROMISE OF MICHAEL NOVAK AS A NEO-ORTHODOX THINKER

If Avery Dulles represents perhaps the greatest conceptualist, synthesizer, and centrist of contemporary Catholic theologians, then Michael Novak may well represent the most creative present-day Catholic theologian. His creativeness is particularly manifest in his recent theological investigations of what he calls “democratic capitalism.” In his most major work to date, The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (1982), he argues the case that a tripartite system of political economy termed “democratic capitalism” consisting of a democratic polity, a market-based economy, and a pluralistic and liberal culture best meets the this-worldly goals of the Judaic-Christian heritage.87 The sub-systems, for the author, are both interdependent and independent, thus influencing each other in a positive way, but providing checks and balances that guard against the absolutism
characteristic of either traditionalist or socialist systems. Democratic capitalism, for Novak, is neither the Kingdom of God nor without sin. Nonetheless, the author argues that it is superior to all other forms of political economy because it alone has devised a successful technique for mastering the material world, producing wealth, raising the standard of living, alleviating poverty, as well as extending human liberty and freedom. That democratic capitalism meets the requirements of the this-worldly goals of the Judaic-Christian vocation only indirectly and, at times, unintentionally, is, for the author, a small price to pay. The religious and moral superiority of democratic capitalism over socialism (and feudalism) lies in empirical results and not in lofty, but unworkable and hence false ideals.

In the follow-up volume, Freedom with Justice (1984), Novak specifically examines the relationship of democratic capitalism to Catholic social thought. He states his thesis clearly:

Although the Catholic Church during the nine-teenth and early twentieth centuries set itself against liberalism as an ideology, it has slowly come to support the moral efficacy of liberal institutions. Most clearly, it has come to support institutions of human rights. But it has also - more slowly - come to support institutions of democracy and market oriented economic development. There is a profound consonance (although not identity) between the Catholic vision of social justice and the liberal institutions which, in this poor and broken world, have better than others allowed the human spirit to flourish. Catholic social thought, learning from experience, will almost certainly continue in this direction.

It will continue in this direction, for Novak, because “the logic of Catholic social thought has, through trial and error, already set in place the basic liberal benchmarks: the dignity of the human person, the interdependence of all peoples, the economic development of all nations, institutions of human rights, the communitarian personality, and the vocation of each human being to become a co-creator with God in unlocking the secrets so lovingly hidden in nature by nature’s God.” Novak ends his volume with what is essentially a Catholic benediction of democratic capitalism: “The task before Catholic social thought is to identify the institutions through which these ideals, common to Judaism, Christianity, and liberalism, become routinized in this poor world of sinful but aspiring mankind.”

Novak argues the case that Catholic social thought has been unduly shaped by a European heritage that has pitted the liberal and Catholic traditions over and against each other. One result is that Catholic social thought is unnecessarily biased against American institutional arrangements which, to a large degree for the author, reflect the practical wisdom and moral realism of Catholic social thought, especially in the figure of Thomas Aquinas. It is within the ever reformable and ever more perfectible institutional arrangements of democratic capitalism that the two ancient enemies of the human race, that is, poverty and tyranny, can best be overcome. Catholic social thought has been too concerned with the issue of the distribution of wealth and not enough with the question of how wealth can be generated and with the practical institutional arrangements that both encourage and protect freedom and creativity. Furthermore, for Novak, classical liberalism and Catholicism can serve for each other a vitally important self-correcting function. As he puts it:

Liberalism need(s) the Catholic sense of community, of transcendence, of realism, of irony, of tragedy, of evil. And Catholicism need(s) the institutions of liberalism for the incarnation in society of its own vision of the dignity of the human person, of the indispensable role of free associations, and of the limited state respectful of the rights of conscience.

Substantively, Novak’s thesis will grate on these Catholic thinkers intent on continuing to experiment with Marxism. Novak’s thesis may also, quite frankly, offend those traditionalists who refuse to acknowledge the historically “conditioned” (as contrasted to historically “determined”) nature of Catholic social thought. Novak, from the viewpoint of this reviewer, seems quite faithful to the words by which his book is dedicated: “To all those who love, and wish to advance, Catholic social thought.” The author obviously knows and loves the insights and truth embodied within the Catholic tradition while, at the same time, he searches honestly in his attempt to understand its evolution in reaction to a changing environment. Combining audaciousness, learnedness, and inspiration in about equal measure, Novak is quite consciously trying to contribute to and shape the direction of Catholic social thought. From the perspective of the neoorthodox approach of this paper, all of this is perfectly legitimate for a Catholic lay theologian given that such intellectual contributions are, again, placed in a
author obviously knows and loves the insights and truth embodied within the Catholic tradition while, at the same time, he searches honestly in his attempt to understand its evolution in reaction to a changing environment. Combining audaciousness, learnedness, and inspiration in about equal measure, Novak is quite consciously trying to contribute to and shape the direction of Catholic social thought. From the perspective of the neoorthodox approach of this paper, all of this is perfectly legitimate for a Catholic lay theologian given that such intellectual contributions are, again, placed in a cybernetic framework. Such a framework guarantees two things: 1) that culture and society remain subordinate to the Catholic faith in any dialogue and 2) that the Magisterium, while freely encouraging (and needing) the insights, arguments, and claims of individuals like Michael Novak, retains the short-term right to control the nature, i.e., the content, flow, and tempo, of such input.

THE PROMISE OF GEORGE WEIGEL AS A NEO-ORTHODOX THINKER

Mention should be made of an important treatise dealing with the history of American Catholic thought on war and peace recently published by George Weigel. In his *Tranquillitas Ordinis* (1987) the author argues that systematic Catholic social thought on the moral problems of war and peace started in the patristic period with St. Augustine’s just-war theory and was subsequently modified, most prominently, by St. Thomas Aquinas, by such later neo-scholastic commentators as Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suarez and, on the American scene, by John Courtney Murray. Adapting and modifying St. Augustine’s definition of the term, Weigel labels this constantly developing Catholic tradition that of “*tranquillitas ordinis*” defined as “the peace of public order in dynamic political community.” *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, for Weigel, is a tradition of “moderate realism” that stands between Hobbesian and utopian thought. As Weigel himself puts it:

Recognizing the beast in the human heart, the tradition yet affirmed that we are not, at bottom, beasts, even under the pressures of the quest for political power. Understanding that conflict is a constant of the human condition - the political meaning of the doctrine of original sin – the tradition still claimed that political community, rightly ordered, provides a morally worthy means for resolving conflict on this side of the Kingdom of God. Political community and the Kingdom must never be confused; all the works of our hands, and particularly our political works, which are so fraught with ambiguity, stand under judgement. But the sinner who takes up the burden of creating and sustaining political community ordered to the common good is, simultaneously, a spark struck from the creativity of the Godhead. We are, in the end, the image of God in history, and the task of history is one we cannot lay down.

Weigel argues, furthermore and to his chagrin, that the classical Catholic heritage of tranquillitas ordinis was largely abandoned in the post-Vatican II Church in the United States. It has instead been replaced by a new vision, itself a blend of secular ideas legitimated by a selective reappropriation of Biblical passages which has acquired plausibility given a host of specific historical, social-structural, and cultural factors of the post 1966 era. Weigel argues, in essence, that this recent worldview is neither authentically Catholic or effective as a method of securing a peace with a freedom that is indivisible. The author ends his analysis by stating the belief that the classical Catholic heritage of tranquillitas ordinis can be resurrected and further developed in light of future experience.

Where Novak would add to the Catholic tradition, Weigel chastises because of its abandonment. But what was said of Novak can be repeated in the case of Weigel vis-a-vis the issue of neo-orthodoxy. Weigel knows and loves his Church well. He understands how her social thought has been affected throughout time and space. He is willing to make prudential judgements about the direction she is presently taking on the legitimately debatable issues of social policy. What Weigel - like Novak - has yet to do but should do - is consciously place his intellectual contribution into a cybernetic relationship with that of the Magisterium acknowledging that the latter is the final arbiter of Catholic truth and practice.

THE POTENTIAL OF PAUL E. SIGMUND AS A CATHOLIC NEO-ORTHODOX THINKER

One final volume will be analyzed because it deals
so clearly and centrally on an issue of great importance to Catholics in the modern world. This is the issue of the plausibility and applicability of natural law theory in contemporary contexts that stress historicity and relativity. Natural Law in Political Thought is authored by Paul E. Sigmund and was first published in 1971 and then reissued in 1982.  

Sigmund starts his analysis by noting that:

One of the prime targets of the current ferment in higher education is the irrelevance of much contemporary social science to fundamental moral problems. Current student concern is focused on the issues of authority, legitimacy, equality, war, sexuality, and community. These problems are not new to the history of moral and political theory. They have been discussed and analyzed before - and one of the principal methods used to resolve them, at least until the end of the eighteenth century, has been through the appeal to certain basic principles or values inherent in human nature - the theory of natural law.  

Sigmund elaborates on his understanding of “natural law” as follows:

While it may appear that the variety of forms and content attributed to natural law in the last 2500 years has resulted in considerable confusion about its meaning, there seems to be a central assertion expressed or implied in most theories of natural law. This is the belief that there exists in nature and/or human nature a rational order which can provide intelligible value-statements independently of human will, that are universal in application, unchangeable in their ultimate content, and morally obligatory on mankind. These statements are expressed as laws or as moral imperatives which provide a basis for the evaluation of legal and political structures.  

Sigmund presents two purposes for his volume. The first is to demonstrate how natural law has been used as a standard by which to judge legal and political actions from fifth century B.C. Greece throughout the ages up through the present. He starts his analysis by arguing that Plato and Aristotle laid the foundations of a theory of natural law, but that it was in the writings of the Roman Cicero that one finds the earliest statement of a comprehensive theory of natural law. Sigmund gives special attention to the relationship of natural law to three important historical developments - Rome’s extended influence over Western Europe, the fusion of Christianity and classical culture in the Middle Ages, especially in the form of the great synthesis of Thomas Aquinas, and the emergence of liberal individualism from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. His survey also includes many authors who, at least up until recently, were not considered natural law thinkers such as Burke, Rousseau, Kant, and Marx. Speaking of a major watershed era in the history of natural law, Sigmund notes that:

In the writings of the seventeenth century theorists, natural law was transformed from a basic order in the universe which depended on God’s sovereign will and the inherent rationality of the cosmos into a guarantee of individual rights and a ground for political equality. The rational individual, rather than the ordered universe, was now the starting point. The old hierarchies had disappeared. The earlier assumption that in all but the most obviously unjust societies the existing order represented God’s will and reflected the order of the universe was now challenged by a new awareness of the possibilities of a restructuring of society by autonomous, rational, and equal individuals. The eighteenth century, the period in which these ideas gained nearly universal acceptance, was also the period in which the doctrine of natural law began to be attacked and belief in its validity began to decline.  

The second purpose of the volume attempts “to point toward the possible construction of a more dynamic and viable theory based on human needs and potentialities. A reconstruction of the natural law theory (which will suggest that its terminology be abandoned but that its method and goal be retained) will be undertaken because it seems that man can never give up the search for a
rational justification of political and moral values.” In his conclusion, Sigmund provides a rudimentary analysis in terms of “human needs and potentialities” which “could be used to develop standards and principles which are related to human nature without making the ontological claims that most natural law theorists make.”

For Sigmund:

An attempt to specify these needs and potentialities somewhat more concretely may produce a result which is remarkably similar to what natural law theorists have been saying all along. Starting from a universally-felt need for survival, it can be argued that, in order to survive, man must live in a society under common rules, which are necessary to protect human life and to defend the community. Security, social cooperation, equality, freedom, and more difficult of accomplishment, community and love—these are some of the human needs and potentialities by which social, political, and economic institutions may be evaluated. The use of these goals as standards preserves something of the attempt of natural law theory to develop universal and objective norms related to human nature. It avoids, however, the ‘essentialism’ implied by the older formulation.

The criticism of Sigmund’s work from an up-dated Catholic neo-orthodox perspective is rather straightforward. His examination of the place of natural law thinking in political theory, past and present, is lucid, balanced, and reasonable. Similarly, his understanding of the social and individual reasons for both the evolution and current attenuation of the idea of natural law is invaluable. His commitment to somehow bridge the fiery brook of relativity and to overcome the accepted present day Machiavellian maxim that “might makes right” is both commendable and perhaps an indicator that his own Catholic heritage is not, for him, completely dormant.

On the other hand, Sigmund gives no evidence whatsoever of placing his insights and prudential judgements into a cybernetic framework placing the Magisterium of the Catholic Church in a superordinate position. Like many contemporary sociologists of Catholic background, the political scientist Paul Sigmund is apparently unaware of his surrender to the authorities of modernity. He has no use for the “essentialism” of the classical thinkers nor for their “ontological aspirations” or “old hierarchies.” Under the guise of an escape from Catholic “authoritarianism” and a move toward “objective,” “universal” scholarship, Sigmund, like so many other young and promising modern-day “communal Catholics,” has actually trapped himself in the narrower, more particularistic confines of present day fads and tyrannies. There is much of value in Sigmund’s book, however, for orthodox Catholics to save and utilize in their attempts at updating, invigorating, and making more “dynamic,” natural law theory.

CONCLUSION: NEO-ORTHOODOXY AND THE FUTURE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

The dispersion of authority within the elite liberal intellectual circles of the Catholic Church of the United States is today, admittedly, at a much more radical stage than it is for the average Catholic-in-the-peus. At least this is the finding of a fascinating one-shot, static analysis comparing the religious beliefs of Catholic theologians and Catholic laity. In their analysis, “Are There Two Catholicisms?,” scholars Byron Johnson, Michael H. Barnes, and Dennis M. Doyle suggest significant differences between theologians and parishioners, but believe the notion that any irreconcilable chasm exists between the two groupings. The findings indicate, more specifically, that theologians showing a considerable amount of diversity, most often tend to offer “nuanced” interpretations of traditional religious beliefs with “traditional” and “highly liberal” responses coming in, respectively, second and third place. Showing somewhat less diversity, parishioners tend, on the other hand, to most often opt for traditional understandings of religious reality but also include, secondly, a considerable percentage registering the nuanced response and, finally, a small but not insignificant percentage taking the highly liberal perspective. In sum, theologians and parishioners do differ on religious beliefs but there is, again, much overlapping of perspectives with neither group taking the highly liberal response as model. Whether the “nuanced” approach of the majority of present theologians represents a “halfway” house to the complete capitulation of the faith to the secular age or a legitimate adaptation of the faith to the present social context remains to be seen.

At first reflection, the Johnson-Barnes-Doyle study might seem to contradict the notion, propounded at the outset of this essay, that the Catholic Church in the United States is presently bordering on an out and out intellectual civil war between “orthodox” and “heterodox”
factions. After all, doesn’t the study indicate that there is a strong middle population of theologians and laity that opt for a central road between Catholic traditionalism and a capitulation of Catholicism to modern secular themes?

While the findings of the study are heartening in one sense, it doesn’t address the issue as to whether or not the Catholic Church in the United States today has a religious, moral, and intellectual “center” that provides form and articulation to the moderate positions expressed by the theologians and laity questioned by the researchers. Put another way, there is a significant difference between an aggregate of individuals holding centrist positions in terms of belief and activity and a well-institutionalized middle-of-the-road option that is available for such individuals to attach themselves to in an intellectual and emotional way. Put very crudely, there is a civil war taking place in today’s U.S. Catholic Church and it is one, for the most part, that involves the Church’s religious and intellectual leadership. The balkanization of U.S. Catholicism’s elite leadership sector, furthermore, does very much have implications for the future of Catholicism in the United States. Simply put, it is precisely the task of our intellectual leadership to create categories of thought, to provide “mental hooks,” if you will, for the “average” U.S. Catholic layperson in the pews. That our present-day intellectual leadership has failed to sufficiently provide a fully articulated and clear method of being a “modern, orthodox, American Catholic” tends to tear the U.S. Catholic Church apart and forces the everyday Catholic to make unpopular, extreme, and unhealthy choices of a religious nature. Eventually, for better or worse, intellectuals do make a difference and hence the need for an up-dated neo-orthodoxy.

An updated neo-orthodox perspective featuring a cybernetic approach that grants an ultimate status to the Church Magisterium would have no fear of a Monsignor George A. Kelly when he acknowledges that the Church does not “consider it unseeming to borrow from Protestantism or secularism, as once she did from Judaeists, Stoics, and Greeks.” Neither would such an approach disagree in the slightest with a Monsignor Eugene V. Clark who calls for a return to:

A vision of the practice of centuries . . . whereby an educated and informed layman could be aware that he had more information or perception in ecclesial subjects than a particular Bishop and, at the same time, recognize that the bishop performs a function as guardian to ‘word and sacrament,’ a function guaranteed by Christ and radical to the Church’s existence. With that Catholic vision he could advise and share his wisdom with an open Bishop and indeed urge his conclusions or reforms in the public forum without damaging or pretending not to see the Bishop’s role as local teacher of the universal Magisterium. Of course, this assumes that the expert, as a Catholic, recognized doctrinal authority in the hierarchy.

Such a cybernetic approach would be quite consistent with the ideas of Catholic theologian William E. May in his essay on the “Catholic Principles of Scholarship and Learning.” For May:

Because the Magisterium always teaches with an authority that the Catholic respects as more than human in origin, the committed Catholic will have a connatural eagerness to accept all that the Magisterium teaches ... This connatural eagerness and a willingness to give a ‘religious assent of soul’ do not, however, at least in my opinion, exclude the possibility of raising questions and suggesting hypotheses that may be in contradiction to Magisterial teachings, provided that in raising questions and suggesting alternatives the Catholic scholar 1) can appeal to other Magisterial teachings more certainly and definitively taught with which the scholar thinks the teachings questioned are incompatible, and 2) is willing to submit his conclusions to the judgment of the Magisterium. Moreover, in proposing hypotheses and alternatives, the Catholic scholar must not claim that fellow Catholics are free to set aside Magisterial teachings and put his own opinions in their place. One’s own opinions are surely not infallible, and Catholics ought never to prefer the opinions of scholars, however learned, to the authoritative teachings of those to whom our Lord has given the right and responsibility to speak in his name.

And finally, such a cybernetic approach would be consistent with Gaudium et Spes which grants the Catholic scholar his/her “lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and of the freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about those matters in which they enjoy competence.” The fact, however, that the Catholic Church in the United States desperately requires the institutionalization of a neo-orthodox perspective in order to gain and maintain authenticity and vitality is no guarantee of the crystallization of such a development,
at least in the short run. While all Catholics are firmly convinced that Christ protects his Church from ultimate failure, this by no means guarantees that any national division of the Church Universal shall endure. The question, then, remains: What is the likelihood of a neo-orthodox perspective being institutionalized? The answer, as I’ve previously argued, depends on the degree to which the Catholic Church in the United States is able to strengthen the internal consistence and coherence of its “plausibility structure,” of its ability to establish itself as a “mediating structure” between Catholics and the outer society and between God and man. This, in turn, depends on the ability of the Church leadership to socialize, maintain, enforce, and evangelize the faith. Since the pontificate of his Holiness, John Paul II, the results have been mixed but there are promising signs of a resurgent neo-orthodox Catholicism. Among these are the appointment of dynamic, sophisticated orthodox Bishops, the creation of new institutes of higher education like Christendom College, the emergence of exciting Catholic publishing ventures like Ignatius Press and Crisis magazine as well as the steady growth of orthodox intellectual forums like The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars. Another positive development is the recent creation of a Catholic Academy of Sciences founded in the United States in 1987, based on principles very closely associated with what has here been termed “neo-orthodoxy.” The Academy is “to be a proponent of future scientific advancements that are consonant with reasoned understanding of Roman Catholic teachings” while the Academy’s policy is “to support the Magisterium ... of the Church, but if truth requires it, to advise through the consensus of the Academy to whomever it may apply, that a scientific incongruity exists.”

After almost twenty-five years of searching for “ecumenical” agreement with other religions and worldviews - oftentimes at the expense of the integrity and effectiveness of the faith, - the time has now come for the Catholic Church to reverse priorities. The Church, while not turning its back to the world, must discover the truth, beauty, utility, and glory of her own now neglected traditions. In this sense, a Catholic neoorthodoxy stands directly opposed to a Richard John Neuhaus when, in his deceptively titled The Catholic Moment, he states that: John Paul, Joseph Ratzinger, the Extraordinary Synod - they represent to some an effort to turn back; to others an effort to rescue the institutional remains of an authority that is no longer plausible; to yet others an effort to chart a course of faithfulness in the absence of false certitudes that once put their leadership beyond question. From an ecumenical perspective, one must hope that the last is the accurate reading of what they intend.

Contrary to Neuhaus for whom the issue of the “crisis of authority” within the Catholic Church is a “theologically uninteresting question” and for whom the issue of ecumenicity on distinctly Lutheran terms is paramount, the Catholic Church must first be the Catholic Church. This means a central commitment to the supernatural authority of the Magisterium and to the “tightening up” of her “institutional,” i.e., theological and structural, integrity. Only then should the principle Church of Christ engage in the important, but secondary and derivative, activity of ecumenical endeavor. Will such a “tightening up” inevitably produce positive results? Might it save the Catholic Church of the United States? Could we actually, then, see a true “Catholic moment” in America? Sociologically all of this is possible, but, in the final analysis, these issues lie in the hand of God.
NOTES


6I am in general agreement with the understanding of dissent propounded by Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., in his Magisterium (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983). According to Sullivan, “If, in a particular instance, Catholics have offered their ‘religious submission of mind and will’ to the authority of the magisterium, by making an honest and sustained effort to achieve internal assent to its teaching, and still find that doubts about its truth remain so strong in their minds that they cannot actually give their sincere intellectual assent to it, I do not see how one could judge such non-assent, or internal dissent, to involve any lack of obedience to the magisterium. Having done all that they were capable of doing towards achieving assent, they actually fulfilled their obligation of obedience, whether they achieved internal assent or not” (p. 166). See also my review of the book in Religious Education, vol. 81, no. 1, 1986, pp. 148-150.


23Furfey and his students wrote extensively in, among other places, *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, especially in the 1940’s and 1950’s.


27I refer you to the overall argument in my *Toward the Establishment of Liberal Catholicism in America*, *op. cit.*, 1983.

28Neuhaus in his *The Catholic Moment, op. cit.*, 1987, makes the argument that the theology of Pope John Paul II and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger is consistent, in many respects, with the Lutheran “Two Kingdoms” or “paradoxical” model as discussed by H.R. Niebuhr in his classic work, *Christ and Culture*, *op. cit.*, 1951.

29This statement can be found in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, eds. (New York: America Press, 1966, p. 715).

30I am presently writing a manuscript tentatively titled, “Catholicism and Sociology: The Birth, Death, and Resurrection of ‘Catholic Sociologies’.”


34Ironically, I picked up the claim that Dulles’ analysis produces a “disembodied Catholicism” from the title of a review by Paul Lakeland of Dulles’ *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1986) in *Cross-Currents*, vol. XXXVII, no. 1, Spring, 1987, pp. 112-114. Lakeland, an advocate of liberation and feminist theologies,
is critical of Dulles because, in the former’s position, Catholicism fails to actualize the ideal state of affairs posited by
the latter. Orthodox Catholics can claim, conversely, that an ideal state of affairs does not even approximately exist, in
part, precisely because of the conceptual confusion caused by Dulles’ understanding and advocacy of a disembodied
pluralism.


36Ibid., p. 1.
37Ibid., p. 6.
38Ibid., p. 8.
39Ibid., p. 9.
40Ibid., p. 15.
41Ibid., p. 20.

43Ibid., p. 100.
44Ibid., p. 84.
45Ibid., p. 84.
46Ibid., p. 88.
48Ibid., pp. 90-1.
49Ibid., p. 101.

Exegesis Today,” paper delivered at St. Peter’s Church, Citicorp Center, New York City, on January 27, 1988 and
sponsored by The Rockford Institute Center on Religion and Democracy. Also see my book review of Lester Kurtz’s *The

53Avery Dulles, S.J., *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: Crossroad, 1983,
p. 6). Dulles completes his sentence with the following, “... but for many this image accents the very features they
find least admirable and attractive.” Given that the Catholic Church is not run by opinion polls and that this dissent
is specific to what I’ve previously termed the “new Catholic knowledge class” (cf. Varacalli, *Toward the Establishment
of Liberal Catholicism in America, op. cit.*, 1983) and to a certain upper-middle class Catholic “Yuppie” constituency (cf.
Varacalli, “The State of the American Catholic Laity,” op. cit., 1987), this qualifier means very little. If Catholic
individuals feel that they no longer have any use for the Catholic tradition; that they, in effect, have “outgrown” it, they
are obviously free to leave it.

56*Lumen Gentium*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, editors (New York:
America Press, 1966), no. 22.

59Ibid., 1967, p. 27.
comes close to my understanding here. As he states, Dulles’ “sacramental model presents the Church as ‘a reality im-
bued with the hidden presence of God’ ... it is closest in meaning to H.R. Niebuhr’s Christ of culture (model).”

62Ibid., p. 2.
63Ibid., p. 18.
64Ibid., p. 39.
65Ibid., pp. 5-6.


Ibid., 1984, p. xiii.

Ibid., p. 218.

Ibid., p. 33.


Ibid., 1987, p. 45.


Ibid., p. v.

Ibid., p. v.

Ibid., p. vii.

Ibid., pp. 88-9.

Ibid., p. ix.

Ibid., p. 209.

Ibid., pp. 209-10.

Ibid., p. 209.

Ibid., pp. 209-10.