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Can the Seamless Garment Be Sewn?
The Future of Pro-Life Progressivism

Another Social Justice Tradition:
Catholic Conservatives

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Fides et Iustitia

ARTICLE

ANOTHER SOCIAL JUSTICE TRADITION: CATHOLIC CONSERVATIVES

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The following two letters were exchanged between Catholic social thinkers during the early 1920s. The first is from Conde Pallen, a Catholic layman, to Monsignor John Ryan, of the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC):

Pardon me if I fail to see in you and Dr. [Father Raymond] McGowan in Washington the sole depositories of the wisdom of the Holy Ghost in matters economic. I am content to accept Leo XIII's principles and teachings on these matters as set forth in his Encyclical "Rerum Novarum." Indeed I am quite confident that Rome has a much stronger and juster claim to be the seat of infallibility than Washington. . . . You seem to think that the only economic orthodoxy is your 'doxy, and that anyone who presumes to criticize any phase of your 'doxy is a knave, a prevaricator and a conspirator against the peace of injured innocence.¹

The second is from Father William Engelen to Frederick Kenkel of the Catholic Central Verein. Engelen had been invited to a meeting on Catholic social thought, which was to include Ryan and his colleagues from the NCWC: "I do not care to go. Is it any use? Can we agree at all? I suppose their liberal ideas will eventually sweep everything. Can we afford, even to appear in their following?"²

As these excerpts suggest, disagreement among Catholics concerning social and economic issues is neither an uncommon, nor a new, phenomenon. Historian David O'Brien describes the New Deal period as "characterized by unanimous and enthusiastic approval of official Church teachings

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1. Joseph M. McShane, "*Sufficiently Radical*": *Catholicism, Progressivism, and the Bishops' Program of 1919*, at 229-30 (Cath. U. Am. Press 1986) (quoting John A. Ryan & Conde Pallen, *Correspondence*, Winona Courier 26-28 (Aug. 1921)).

2. Ltr. from Rev. William Engelen to Fredrick Kenkel, Dir., Catholic Central Verein of America (Nov. 29, 1922) (microformed on U. Notre Dame Archives, Catholic C. Verein of Am. Records 4/18).

and wide, often bitter, disagreement over their meaning and application.”³ I have argued elsewhere that the same is true for the first half of the twentieth century as a whole.⁴ Few would doubt that discord characterized American Catholic life in the second half of the century.⁵

Following the lead of the symposium’s organizers, I will for the sake of this discussion split the Catholic approaches to political and economic policy into two groups: *progressives* and *anti-progressives* (or *conservatives*). Progressives will be those who more or less align with the political Left in the United States, from the progressive era through the present. Conservatives will be those who more or less align with the political Right. At the same time, the relationship between any individual thinker and the tradition into which this article lumps them is complex. In seeking to understand fully the important figures in this history, it is inadequate to divide them simply into one of two camps, and this inadequacy will be noted at appropriate points.⁶

This essay will outline the differences between progressive and conservative Catholic approaches and explain in more detail the stance of the conservatives. Because less attention has been paid to the historical development of the conservative approach, it will also sketch this development through treatments of several major figures. Finally, it will conclude that the conservative approach represents a tradition of thought that is not only consistent with authoritative Catholic social teaching, but is also an important corrective to deficiencies in the progressive approach. Conservatives’ hesitance to invoke government, recognition of the potential of business and the market, and emphasis on personal responsibility and civil society are all valuable contributions to a public discussion about the most effective means of alleviating poverty, ensuring justice, and serving the common good.

3. David J. O’Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform: The New Deal Years* 212 (Oxford U. Press 1968). Lawrence DeSaulniers, who has documented the Catholic press’s reaction to the New Deal, similarly notes the obverse: despite significant diversity on specific policy questions, most Catholics were united in their belief that the papal encyclicals held the key to the solution of economic problems. Lawrence B. DeSaulniers, *The Response in American Catholic Periodicals to the Crises of the Great Depression, 1930–1935*, at 117 (U. Press of Am. 1984).

4. See Kevin E. Schmiesing, *Within the Market Strife: American Catholic Economic Thought from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II* (Lexington Books 2004).

5. Msgr. George A. Kelly, a participant in the strife, uses the metaphor of warfare in a classic treatment of the immediate post-Vatican II era. See Msgr. George A. Kelly, *The Battle for the American Church* (Doubleday 1979).

6. I will normally use the term “conservative,” since that is probably the term most commonly applied to the figures I will be highlighting. Two recent studies that treat the relationship between Catholics and American progressivism in the early twentieth century illustrate the distinctive character of Catholic reformers vis-à-vis non-Catholic progressives. See John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* ch. 5 (W.W. Norton & Co. 2003); Thomas E. Woods Jr., *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era* (Colum. U. Press 2003).

The Progressives

In the first half of the century, the major figure in the progressive Catholic pantheon was the aforementioned Monsignor John Ryan (1865–1945). Ryan grew up in Minnesota, studied at Catholic University of America, and wrote a dissertation on the concept of a living wage—the published version of which earned the praise of progressive luminary Richard Ely, who saw in it the “first attempt in the English language to elaborate what may be called a Roman Catholic system of political economy.”⁷

When the newly formed national organization of Catholic bishops, the NCWC,⁸ decided to issue a statement on the American economy, they called on Ryan to draft it.⁹ The result was the bishops’ Program of Social Reconstruction of 1919, which called for minimum wage laws, social insurance against unemployment, old age, and illness, and the abolition of child labor.¹⁰

This foray by the bishops into economic policy stirred up opposition among more conservative Catholics, including Conde Pallen, whose response was quoted above.¹¹ Some bishops even disagreed with parts of the statement, a telling indication of the discordant views among Catholics on public policy issues. Defying the hopes of the Social Action Department and many bishops, the program, instead of crystallizing Catholic opinion in favor of a set of reforms, highlighted the challenges any such effort would encounter.¹²

Lines of division between progressive and non-progressive Catholics were made clearer with the onset of the Great Depression and the enactment of the legislation intended to address it. John Ryan became the best-known Catholic defender of New Deal programs, earning him the epithet “Right Reverend New Dealer” from the radio priest Charles Coughlin.

7. Richard T. Ely, *Introduction*, in John Ryan, *A Living Wage: Its Ethical and Economic Aspects* i, xii (Macmillan 1906). It is also important to note that Ryan himself amply demonstrates the limitations of labeling Catholics according to the conventional categories of American political history. Ryan was an early board member of the American Civil Liberties Union, but he eventually resigned from membership—despite the pleading of the ACLU’s president—over what he viewed as the ACLU’s extreme position on academic freedom as well as irreconcilable differences over the issue of birth control. See Francis L. Broderick, *Right Reverend New Dealer: John A. Ryan* 142–43 (Macmillan 1963).

8. On the formation of the NCWC, see Elizabeth McKeown, *War and Welfare: American Catholics and World War I* ch. 3 (Garland 1988).

9. McShane, *supra* n. 1, at ch. 4.

10. *Id.* For the story of the program’s genesis, drafting, and reception, including Ryan’s involvement, see *id.* at ch. 4–5. For the text of the bishops’ program, see *Pastoral Letters of the United States Catholic Bishops* vol. 1 1792–1940, 255–71 (Hugh J. Nolan ed., U.S. Catholic Conf. 1984).

11. McShane, *supra* n. 1.

12. *Id.*, at 184, *passim*. For a history of bishops’ statements on policy, see Michael Warner, *Changing Witness: Catholic Bishops and Public Policy, 1917–1994* (Ethics and Pub. Policy Ctr. & William B. Eerdmans Publ. 1995).

For Ryan and other progressive Catholics, the cause of the Depression lay in the greed of capitalists and in the excessive freedom that they enjoyed to exercise it. A return to prosperity—and a more equitable prosperity—lay within the power of government. Father William Kerby, one of Ryan's mentors at Catholic University and a colleague at the Social Action Department, summed up the judgment of the progressives: “[W]e have less occasion to fear codes, even planned production, State paternalism, and a diminishing return on capital than we have to fear economic slavery, broken health, constant worry, disrupted homes, massive poverty and insecurity”¹³

The Conservatives

As the quotations at the head of this article indicate, Ryan and his colleagues at the NCWC were not universally viewed as reliable spokesmen for “the Catholic” position on social questions. There were many Catholics who disagreed with Ryan's interpretation and application of the Church's social teaching. William Engelen and his correspondent, Frederick Kenkel (1863-1952), represented the conservative viewpoint.

Engelen and Kenkel belonged to the group of ethnic Germans whom historian Philip Gleason has called the “conservative reformers.”¹⁴ These socially concerned Catholics were associated with the Catholic Central Verein (CCV). Founded in 1855 and headquartered in St. Louis, the CCV was one of the oldest Catholic social institutions in the country and maintained a long tradition of charity and publication on social questions. In a series of controversies that rocked the Catholic Church in the United States in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, it took a stance opposite that of “Americanists” such as Ryan's superior, Archbishop John Ireland. The CCV retained its strong ethnic German character and favored European models of economic organization over what it perceived as the overly individualist model regnant in America. In its first statement on systematic social reform in 1905, the Central Verein boldly proposed a corporatist economic system for the United States. This plan “aroused little enthusiasm,” however, and was “never again presented . . . in so extreme or rigid a formulation.”¹⁵

In 1909, Kenkel assumed control of the Verein's Central Bureau and directed it for more than four decades until his death in 1952. Under Kenkel's leadership, the CCV remained devoted to the teachings of the Church as expressed in papal encyclicals and also continued to draw on the legacy of German social thought emanating from the noted advocate of so-

13. William Kerby, *The Old Deal and the New*, *Cath. Mind* 271, 276 (July 22, 1934).

14. Philip Gleason, *The Conservative Reformers: German-American Catholics and the Social Order* (U. Notre Dame Press 1968).

15. *Id.* at 68, 45, 87. On the Americanist debates, see Thomas T. McAvoy, *The Great Crisis in American Catholic History: 1895-1900* (Regnery Publ. 1957).

cial reform, Bishop Wilhelm von Ketteler of Mainz, and from corporatists of the early twentieth century, particularly Jesuit economist Heinrich Pesch. At the level of policy, in the 1910s, the CCV supported organized labor, state legislation concerning minimum wages and the labor of women and children, workmen's compensation laws, and government regulation of industrial safety.¹⁶

Although Kenkel never embraced capitalism and was generally critical of the American economic system, he also stressed the dangers of centralization of economic functions in government, especially at the national level. He read signs of danger in the proclivity of progressive-era reform to rely on government action. "I see the day coming," he predicted in 1916, "when we, who for 20 years have said *there is a social question*, who have been called socialists, may be forced to . . . protest against the radical tendencies of the day. I believe . . . I will see the day when I will . . . [be] forced to say: 'This is the hour of state-socialism.'"¹⁷

In 1930, he explained that the Central Bureau opposed a bill under consideration by Congress "primarily because it is unwilling the Federal government should engage in activities which, in their very nature, should be left to individuals, private organizations, municipalities, counties, and states."¹⁸ With the advent of the New Deal, Kenkel's warnings against state centralization took on added urgency.

John Ryan and Kenkel cooperated in some instances and Ryan continued to view Kenkel as an ally in the field of social reform. As Ryan assumed the role of public defender of Roosevelt's policies, however, Kenkel distanced himself from Ryan's views. In 1935, Kenkel indicated privately that his discomfort with Ryan's views had been building for some time. "I have lost confidence in Msgr. Ryan," he wrote to Joseph Matt.¹⁹ Kenkel criticized Ryan for being "strong for public works," in spite of "the great danger of corruption we invite when recommending and inaugurating a spending program."²⁰ "We have been very tolerant of him," he continued, "for the sake of the common cause, and because I did not think it wise to

16. Gleason, *supra* n. 14, at 128, *passim*. On Ketteler, see Paul Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe: From the Onset of Industrialization to the First World War* 90, *passim* (Crossroad Publ. Co. 1991).

17. Gleason, *supra* n. 14, at 127.

18. Ltr. from Frederick Kenkel, Dir., Catholic Central Verein of America, to Members of the Major Executive Committee of the Catholic Central Verein of America (Apr. 28, 1930) (microformed on U. Notre Dame Archives, Catholic C. Verein of Am. Records 1/28: Central Bureau correspondence 1920-1941); *see also* DeSaulniers, *supra* n. 3, at 102-03, for evidence that the CCV's main publication, the *Central-Blatt and Social Justice*, evinced increasing concern with centralization of government power from 1930 on.

19. Ltr. from Frederick Kenkel, Dir., Catholic Central Verein of America, to Joseph Matt, *passim* (Aug. 12, 1935) (microformed on U. Notre Dame Archives, Catholic C. Verein of Am. Records 3/07: Matt, Joseph 1906-1950). Matt was the editor of *The Wanderer*, a Catholic newspaper based in St. Paul.

20. *Id.*

create further confusion in the mind of our people, for whom it is so difficult to understand what Christian Social Reform . . . really means and desires to accomplish."²¹ But Ryan's position had always tended toward statism, Kenkel reflected, and for this reason, he had been "frequently, and in principle, not in agreement with him."²²

In the context of the 1930s, Kenkel believed that government aggrandizement of economic power represented, on balance, a threat rather than a benefactor to the common weal. Ryan held that national government was the only institution capable of bringing about more favorable economic conditions for all and thus supported New Deal reform. Both were devoted to the teachings of their Church on social questions and both were committed to the common good; but differing approaches to political economy and differing views about the lessons of the past led to disparate positions on the critical political questions of the day.

Post-War Catholic Conservatism

Divergent judgments about the success of the New Deal and its consonance with Catholic social teaching divided progressives such as Ryan from conservatives such as Kenkel, but the debate between progressives and conservatives shifted as new factors played into political and ideological alliances. The rise of anticommunism after World War II added another dimension to the antistatism that was central to Catholic conservatism. Religion not only became a more popular and public subject in the 1940s and 1950s, it became increasingly perceived as aligned with a conservative political agenda. This was especially the case among Catholics, for whom anticommunism was a religious imperative.²³ "The American Roman Catholic [C]hurch," Richard Gid Powers claims, "would be the backbone of American anticommunism for most of the movement's history."²⁴

21. *Id.*

22. *Id.*

23. On Catholics specifically, see John Earl Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace?: American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era* 92-99 (Ivan R. Dee 1996). On the post-World War II religious boom, see Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* 436-41 (William B. Eerdmans Publg. Co. 1992).

24. Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* 51 (Free Press 1995). Catholics pervade Powers's treatment of the subject. See also Donald F. Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950-1957* (U. N.C. Press 1978). Crosby points out that, though anticommunism was common to Catholic liberals and conservatives, differences between the two groups persisted, and were sometimes reflected in the character of their anticommunism (e.g., how best to fight communism).

For a good example of a cold war Catholic assessment of communism, see John F. Cronin, *Communism: Threat to Freedom* (Natl. Catholic Welfare Conf. 1962). Cronin, assistant director of the Department of Social Action of the NCWC, was not closely identified with either the progressive or the conservative side in policy debates and took care to distance his position from McCarthyism, yet his was a clear and full-throated denunciation of communism on economic, political, and religious grounds.

Not all Catholic anticommunists were conservatives, of course, but the increasing prominence of anticommunism in American domestic and foreign policy debates led many Americans (Catholics included) to perceive a connection between the American left and international communism. The inference gained plausibility because, in some quarters of the left, there *was* a connection, but it was also shrewdly and unfairly exploited by some on the right who painted all of the left with a broad, red brush.²⁵

In this context, Catholics were prominently involved in laying the intellectual and institutional groundwork for what became known—depending on one’s perspective—as “the conservative movement,” or the “vast right-wing conspiracy.” “One is even tempted to say,” historian of conservatism George Nash writes, “that the new conservatism was, in part, an intellectual cutting edge of the postwar ‘coming of age’ of America’s Catholic minority.”²⁶ William Buckley, Whittaker Chambers, Brent Bozell, Russell Kirk, and Garry Wills were among those connected to fledgling conservative institutions and publications.

Not every Catholic conservative strove to show how his or her political positions were compatible with papal social teaching. Father Edward Keller, CSC (1903–1989), however, was concerned to demonstrate such consistency. Born in Cincinnati, Keller joined the Congregation of Holy Cross and studied economics at the University of Minnesota. Before he could complete his dissertation, he was called to teach at his congregation’s premier academic institution, the University of Notre Dame, where he spent the rest of his career as a professor of economics.

Keller’s interpretation of the lessons of the Great Depression differed dramatically from those gleaned by Catholics such as John Ryan. Keller had known personally ex-President Hoover during the 1930s and 1940s and he believed that the picture of Hoover drawn by Roosevelt and the mainstream press was a caricature. In Keller’s view, Hoover had been deeply concerned about Americans suffering impoverishment and had, in fact, implemented measures to relieve the depression, such as the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and spending on public works.²⁷

His sympathetic impression of Hoover made Keller less susceptible to a glowing admiration of Roosevelt, and his understanding of economics reinforced these personal inclinations. “It is my conviction,” he reflected

25. See Crosby, *supra* n. 24. On the linking of communism and progressive economics, see Schmiesing, *supra* n. 4, at 148. Major conservative anticommunists themselves, such as William Buckley and Russell Kirk, disavowed the careless anticommunism of those who made no distinction between communism and American liberalism. See generally Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America* 105-06 (Free Press 1999).

26. George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, at 71 (Intercollegiate Stud. Inst. 1996); see also Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985* (Cornell U. Press 1993).

27. Oral History Interview by Raymond Henle with Edward Keller 2-4, 17-19 (Nov. 4, 1969) (microformed on U. Notre Dame Archives, Edward A. Keller Papers 1/10).

late in life, “that Mr. Hoover’s economic policies would have brought the country prosperity because the Depression ‘bottomed out’ in 1932 and the economy was on the upswing in 1933, and prosperity would have been attained by 1934 if the economy had not be[en] structured into depression by the Roosevelt New Deal.”²⁸

What Keller meant by his claim that Roosevelt’s policies worsened the Depression was made clear in Keller’s published books. His economic research focused on the topic of wealth distribution and he wrote or co-authored four books on the subject in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Through the presentation and analysis of abundant statistics on income and wealth distribution in the United States, Keller intended to demonstrate that income distribution was essentially fair, despite popular impressions to the contrary. More importantly, he noted that the problem of wealth creation is prior to the question of distribution. The relatively high standard of living obtaining among Americans in general was a result of “labor-aiding Tools,” acquired by “individuals who do not spend all of their income for consumer goods and services but save part of their income and invest it in Tools.”²⁹ Acknowledging some disparity in income levels, Keller nonetheless defended the important role of the “rich” in the economy. Roosevelt’s new tax policy of 1933, he argued, stifled the economy by skimming off a large part of the savings of those in higher income brackets—those very people, that is, whose investment of this excess income would have provided the capital to increase productivity and create new wealth.³⁰

In 1947, Keller brought his perspective on the economy to the pages of a popular Catholic periodical, *Ave Maria*. Keller’s burden in a three-part series of articles was to demonstrate that his assessment of the American economy and the policy implications of that assessment were not at odds with Church teachings conveyed through the papal social encyclicals such as *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*.

Though he did not specifically criticize bishops’ statements, Social Action Department personnel, or any other Catholic writers, Keller clearly assumed that there existed a presumptive position among many Catholics—a position that was highly critical of the American economy and against

28. *Id.* at 19. Keller has not been the only scholar to argue that Roosevelt’s policies prolonged rather than ameliorated the Depression. See e.g. Gary Dean Best, *Pride, Prejudice, and Politics: Roosevelt Versus Recovery, 1933-1938* (Praeger 1991) (While Best’s thesis that Roosevelt’s antagonism toward business prevented economic recovery remains controversial, it is generally accepted that many New Dealers shared a belief that big business represented the main obstacle to recovery.); see also Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (Vintage 1996).

29. Edward A. Keller, *The National Income and Its Distribution* 21 (U. Notre Dame 1947).

30. See generally Edward A. Keller & Frank A. Brady, Jr., *National Income in the United States* (Am. Econ. Found. 1954); Edward A. Keller & Frank A. Brady, Jr., *An Inventory of Wealth in the United States* (Am. Econ. Found. 1951); Edward A. Keller, Fred G. Clark & Richard Stanton Rimanoczy, *Who Gets How Much for Doing What in America: A Primer on the Distribution of Income and Property in the United States* (Am. Econ. Found. 1948); Keller, *supra* n. 29, at 21.

which his own position stood in contrast. “[T]he encyclicals do not condemn our economic system of free enterprise,” he wrote in an opening salvo, “but instead give a strong moral foundation for such a system.”³¹ The main economic problem, he further argued, was not “extreme concentration of wealth and income but rather a lack of balance among different worker groups and different geographical segments of the economy.”³²

Keller did not dispute that, in *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pope Pius XI condemned “unlimited competition,” or laissez-faire capitalism. He simply denied that such a system was ever “the dominant ruling principle of our economic system even though at present the attitude of some groups.”³³ He observed that the pontiff did not condemn great wealth, per se, but merely insisted on the responsibility to use such wealth to the benefit of others. In the United States, Keller pointed out, superfluous income had been largely invested in capital, fulfilling admirably *Quadragesimo*’s exhortation to use wealth to increase employment opportunities.³⁴

With other Catholic social thinkers, Keller viewed Catholic social teaching as charting a course “between the two extremes of nineteenth century individualism and socialism.”³⁵ The Church upheld the notion of private property as an individual right, yet emphasized the social responsibilities of ownership. It saw a positive role for the state to play in the economy, yet placed limits on it and warned of the dangers of excessive government interference.³⁶

Keller noted Leo XIII’s enjoinder that ownership ought to be widely distributed and not restricted to an elite class. Citing the widespread ownership of homes, automobiles, and other goods, Keller claimed, “This ideal comes closer to realization in the United States than in any other country in the world.”³⁷ Similarly, productive wealth was widely distributed, with a half-million American corporations and thousands of stockholders in the larger corporations.³⁸

Keller did not pretend that no economic hardship existed. “There are serious weaknesses in the national economy,”³⁹ he wrote; this fact necessitated locating and addressing those weaknesses and not being distracted by false problems such as the gap between rich and poor. The major source of

31. Edward A. Keller, *The Church and Our Economic System [I]*, Ave Maria 263, 263 (Mar. 1, 1947).

32. *Id.*

33. *Id.* at 264.

34. *Id.* at 264-65.

35. Edward A. Keller, *The Church and Our Economic System [II]*, Ave Maria 304, 304 (Mar. 8, 1947).

36. *Id.* at 304-05.

37. *Id.* at 306.

38. *Id.* at 306-07.

39. Edward A. Keller, *The Church and Our Economic System [III]*, Ave Maria 339, 339 (Mar. 15, 1947).

distortion in distribution in the American context, according to Keller, was the differences between worker groups—namely, “between agricultural workers and the non-agricultural workers, and between the highly-organized, highly-paid workers and the unorganized, lower-paid workers.”⁴⁰ Keller was especially concerned for southern share-croppers, who lived in a state of “almost complete dispossession of the land.”⁴¹ The solution to the problem, he argued, lay in industrialization and diversification in agriculture.⁴²

Such points of economic weakness, Keller urged, should not lead to hyperbolic claims about extreme concentration of wealth and class division. The stakes in the debate about the situation of the American worker were high: to exaggerate the plight of the relatively well-off American worker, he warned, would be “terribly dangerous . . . feed[ing] fuel to the spreading fire of world communism.”⁴³

I have placed both Kenkel and Keller on the conservative side, but the two, in fact, differed in significant ways. Keller’s assessment of contemporary American economic life was much more positive than was Kenkel’s. Kenkel’s opposition to the New Deal was driven by fear of state expansion; Keller’s was based more on his perception of its failings as economic policy. In fact, Kenkel and Engelen’s criticism of Ryan (reflected in Engelen’s term *liberal* in the correspondence cited at the head of this article) arose in large part from their belief that Ryan had accepted too completely the premises of modern economic life. Kenkel and the CCV held out for older forms of economic organization, a corporatist economy organized around occupational associations that were similar, if not identical, to medieval guilds. In this way, the lines between progressive and conservative Catholics were tangled. In their anti-statism, Kenkel and Keller were allies; in their acceptance of industrial capitalism, Ryan and Keller shared a common perspective versus Kenkel’s.

By the 1960s, there were indications that polarization among Catholics had intensified. In 1955, for example, Russell Kirk and Erik von Kuhnelt-Leddihn, who had previously published in *America*, the Jesuit weekly, were turned down by that publication. Both had begun writing for *National Review* and had thereby placed themselves outside the mainstream of Catholic social thought. In 1961, the perception that Catholic discord prevented constructive political action led *Ave Maria* editor Donald Thorman to call for a truce between the two camps for the purpose of supporting a common program based on areas of agreement. In the same year, the publication of Pope John XXIII’s social encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*, elicited a critical response from *National Review*, which in turn set off a bitter exchange be-

40. *Id.*

41. *Id.* at 340.

42. *Id.* at 341.

43. *Id.* at 339.

tween William Buckley and Catholic periodicals such as *Commonweal* and *America*.⁴⁴

It is impossible to trace the effects of all of the meaningful events of the 1960s on Catholic conservatism. A short list of such phenomena would include the Second Vatican Council, the civil rights movement, and the escalation of the war in Vietnam and the domestic unrest associated with it.⁴⁵ In this simplified version of the story, with its focus on economic policy, Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty was the pivotal development of the decade.⁴⁶ The Great Society programs were not duplicates of the New Deal, but they served a similar role for a new generation of Catholics. The question whose answer divided Catholic conservatives and progressives was not, Should the poor be helped? It was, Are programs funded and administered by the national government the most effective way of accomplishing that goal?

In the 1970s, shifting allegiances and crossed dividing lines continued to characterize the relationship between Catholic conservatives and progressives. Michael Novak, starting out as a Catholic liberal, moved to the right; Garry Wills went the other way. Older conservatives such as William Buckley and Russell Kirk remained identifiable loci within American conservatism, but newer recruits provided excitement and spurred internecine debates.⁴⁷

The Supreme Court's decisions in favor of legal abortion in *Roe v. Wade*⁴⁸ and *Doe v. Bolton*⁴⁹ injected a new issue into American politics, with long-term ramifications for Catholics. As the Democratic Party gradu-

44. Allitt, *supra* n. 26, at 89-97. For an overview of American Catholicism from 1945 through the early sixties, including a discussion of the various approaches to social issues, see David O'Brien, *Public Catholicism* ch. 8 (Macmillan 1989).

45. For a brief treatment of American Catholicism from 1960-1973, see *id.* at 230-42. For an overview of American conservatism in the 1960s, see *The Conservative Sixties* (David Farber & Jeff Roche eds., Peter Lang Publg. 2003). On Catholic intellectual life in the 1960s, with a focus on higher education, see Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* ch. 14 (Oxford U. Press 1995).

46. For a history of Great Society programs (including those associated with the War on Poverty), see John A. Andrew III, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society* (Ivan R. Dee 1998).

47. Novak's and Wills' intellectual odysseys are detailed in Allitt, *supra* n. 26, at ch. 7. Allitt deftly shows the underlying consistency in what appeared, in both cases, to be dramatic moves from one side of the political spectrum to the other. On the battle between neo- and paleoconservatives, see Nash, *supra* n. 26, at 337-39.

There is not a perfect identity between Catholic neoconservatism (treated in the next section) and neoconservatism more generally. Most of the best-known political neoconservatives are Jewish, and paleoconservatives differ most strenuously with them on issues such as immigration, trade, and the projection of American power abroad. Catholic "cultural radicals" (see below) and progressives, meanwhile, object mainly to Catholic neoconservative judgments on the relative beneficence of capitalism vis-à-vis other economic systems, and the degree to which government should intervene in the economy. (Disagreements about the use of military force also separate Catholic neoconservatives and progressives, but this essay will not address that topic.)

48. 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

49. 410 U.S. 179 (1973).

ally (and with notable exceptions) became aligned with the pro-abortion lobby, Catholic progressives who remained dedicated to Church teaching on the issue struggled to find a political home. As the Republican Party gradually (and with notable exceptions) became identified with the anti-abortion cause, Catholic conservatives gained leverage to shift co-religionists into a more favorable view of the conservative platform more generally.⁵⁰

Catholic Neoconservatives

As it became increasingly clear that the War on Poverty was a failure—or at least was inadequate to the goal of eliminating poverty—many conservatives interpreted the lesson of the failure to be that government aid tended to get bogged down in bureaucracy and that perverse incentives created by welfare programs unintentionally led to more of the problems that the programs were supposed to address.⁵¹ More significantly, some figures previously associated with the Left began to draw similar conclusions. As with all such labels, the common moniker masks important distinctions, but those who came to be called “neoconservatives” became important public voices from a conservative Catholic perspective. Figures such as Richard John Neuhaus and Michael Novak added novel elements to the Catholic anti-progressive heritage, but they also continued to sound traditional themes.⁵² The remainder of this article will focus on this newer form of Catholic conservatism.⁵³

50. Kenneth D. Wald summarizes Catholic political attitudes since 1950 and detects a leftward shift, especially among the bishops and their policy bureaus. Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States* 267-81 (3d ed., CQ Press 1997). From a more conservative perspective, Michael Warner shares this assessment at least with respect to the bishops' conference. Warner, *supra* n. 12, at ch. 5-7. Wald discusses Catholics and the politics of abortion, a discussion that clearly favors the “seamless garment” approach. Wald, *supra* n. 50, at 281-93. Recent studies have demonstrated the significance of distinguishing between active and inactive Catholics in gauging political views. See QEV Analytics, *Catholic Voter Project*, <http://www.qev.com/reports.political.catholic.htm> (accessed Sept. 16, 2005) (compiles and analyzes Catholic voting data tracking political trends).

51. Works influential in forming conservative opinion on government welfare programs were Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (Basic Books 1984), and Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Regnery Publ. 1992). For a debate on the lessons of the Great Society within progressive ranks, see *The Great Society and Its Legacy: Twenty Years of U.S. Social Policy* (Marshall Kaplan & Peggy L. Cuciti eds., Duke U. Press 1986); its conclusion includes a brief critique of Murray's arguments.

52. For a description of the neoconservative Catholic perspective from a movement partisan, see George Weigel, *The Neoconservative Difference: A Proposal for the Renewal of Church and Society*, in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America* 138 (Mary Jo Weaver & R. Scott Appleby eds., Ind. U. Press 1995). Weigel explains the neoconservative position vis-à-vis “conservatives” and “liberals.” His focus is on neoconservatism's theological and ecclesiastical implications rather than its economic policy.

53. This focus in no way implies that Catholic conservatives do not remain a variegated lot. Catholic “cultural radicals” such as David Schindler might fit better, historically speaking, into the Frederick Kenkel wing of conservatism—critical of the state and the contemporary Left, but also deeply suspicious of American capitalism. See Mark Lowery, *The Dialogue between Catholic*

Not unlike Edward Keller, conservative Catholics such as Neuhaus and Novak stress the creation of wealth rather than its distribution when they consider strategies to ameliorate poverty. “The poor should be approached as creators of wealth,” Michael Novak wrote, three years before welfare reform passed in 1996. “They should be assisted in their efforts to make themselves asset-producers rather than mere consumers. The revolution needed in the welfare system—now a dependency-maintaining socialism—is to transform it into an asset-building system.”⁵⁴

Conservative Catholics also stress the importance of intermediate institutions in the addressing of social problems, including poverty.⁵⁵ This emphasis conforms to the principle of subsidiarity, one of the guiding concepts in the modern era of Catholic social teaching. Perhaps the most forceful statement of the concept came in Pope Pius XI’s 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*:

Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.⁵⁶

The way in which this emphasis on mediating institutions fits easily into wider American political and intellectual traditions is indicated by the fact that one of the most important texts on the subject was written by two non-Catholics, Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus. *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society* (1977) argued that families, churches, neighborhoods, and other local institutions might better serve the welfare functions that had increasingly been assimilated by the state. In a revised edition twenty years later, Berger and Neuhaus (the latter now Catholic), reiterated the point:

'Neoconservatives' and Catholic 'Cultural Radicals': Toward a New Horizon, 3 Cath. Soc. Sci. Rev. 41 (1998).

54. Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 164 (Free Press 1993). It is interesting to compare Novak’s critique of the welfare state and recommendations for overcoming poverty with those of welfare state critics of the Left—for example, Thomas F. Jackson, *The State, the Movement, and the Urban Poor: The War on Poverty and Political Mobilization in the 1960s*, in *The “Underclass” Debate: Views from History* 403 (Michael B. Katz ed., Princeton U. Press 1993). Novak and Jackson differ significantly in many respects (for example, Jackson stresses political solutions while Novak focuses on private solutions), but both emphasize empowerment of the poor and both describe the limitations of the existing welfare structure in similar ways (e.g., the tendency of funds earmarked for the poor to be consumed instead by middle-class bureaucrats and social service professionals).

55. Cf. Michael Novak, *Freedom with Justice: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions* 47, 201-08 (Harper & Row 1984).

56. Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, No. 79 (May 15, 1931) (available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_en.html).

[N]othing has happened in the intervening period to make us change our minds about the strategic importance of these intermediate institutions in a modern society. . . . [T]he basic configuration of modern society . . . pits vast, anonymous, and potentially oppressive megastructures against the vulnerable personal worlds of individuals. Foremost among these megastructures, of course, is the modern state.⁵⁷

Thus the antistatist strand in conservative Catholicism persists, but its source is not the libertarian view that the state is a threat because it might prevent the individual from doing whatever he wants.⁵⁸ Instead, inordinate reliance on the state threatens to vitiate the institutions that most effectively promote the common good. “I delink social justice from an uncritical reliance on the blind leviathan of the state,” Novak wrote in his 1993 *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,

and link it, instead, to the concrete intelligence operative in individuals and their free associations within the “civic forum”. . . . The role of the state, I argue, is to strengthen the fertile and creative actions of civil society, not to derogate from them or (God forbid) supplant them.⁵⁹

Concern for intermediate institutions points to another major component of conservative Catholic thought: its critical appreciation of capitalism. Two passages from Pope John Paul II’s 1991 encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, are essential in this connection.

The first is the “if by capitalism . . .” passage, which distinguishes two fields of meaning that might be connoted by the term *capitalism*.⁶⁰ The pope approves of that capitalism “which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in

57. Peter L. Berger & Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society* 145 (Michael Novak ed., 2d ed., AEI Press 1996). The emphasis on intermediate institutions (“associations”) in American life was famously observed by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840), vol. 1, pt. II, ch. 4 and vol. 2, pt. II, ch. 5. German Jesuit Oswald von Nell-Breuning, who drafted much of *Quadragesimo*, noted in a 1969 article the similarity between the principle of subsidiarity and the idea articulated by Abraham Lincoln in the following quotation: “The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do . . . for themselves in their separate and individual capacities. In all that people can individually do for themselves government ought not to interfere.” Oswald von Nell-Breuning, *Subsidiarity*, in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* vol. 6, 114, 115 (Karl Rahner et al. eds., Herder & Herder 1970).

58. On divisions between “libertarians” and “conservatives” within the American conservative movement, see Nash, *supra* n. 26, at ch. 11, epilogue. Allitt notes that libertarianism held little attraction for most Catholic conservatives. Allitt, *supra* n. 26, at 73, 93, 247-48.

59. Novak, *supra* n. 54, at xvi.

60. Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, No. 42 (May 1, 1991) (available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html).

the economic sector.”⁶¹ But he condemns a capitalism “in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious.”⁶² Troubled by the possibility of confusion, the pope suggests the term *free economy* as a substitute for *capitalism*.⁶³

Catholic conservatives embrace this distinction, not wishing to endorse the many abuses that have occurred, and do occur, in capitalism’s name. Neuhaus, who with Novak likes the term *democratic capitalism*, nonetheless recognizes the distinction. “Neither the United States nor any other developed Western country,” he conceded in his 1992 book, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, “represents adequately the ‘free economy’ for which the Pope is calling.”⁶⁴ Conservative Catholics repeat time and again in similar words Novak’s appraisal, “Democratic capitalism is a poor system, but the known alternatives are worse.”⁶⁵ This type of skepticism toward utopianism plays a large role in conservative Catholic thought. “The perfect is the enemy of the good” is another phrase that appears repeatedly.⁶⁶

The other key passage from *Centesimus* reflected in conservative views of capitalism is the caveat, “But there are many human needs which find no place on the market.”⁶⁷ The economic dimension of life, Neuhaus asserts, is “not all-important. The dimension we call political, one might argue, is at least as important, and the cultural is more important than both.”⁶⁸ “Human beings are endowed with reason, virtue, and grace,” he continues, “but are also wounded by sin and inclined to evil. The market has no morality of its own; it simply reflects the morality and immorality of those who participate in it. The common good . . . therefore depends upon the vitality of the political and, above all, moral-cultural spheres.”⁶⁹ “[T]he needs that cannot be left to the market,” Neuhaus further observes, “are the needs most essential to human dignity and fulfillment.”⁷⁰ Novak contends likewise: “Neither the preservation of free political space achieved by democracy nor the achievement of liberation from oppressive poverty wrought by capitalism are sufficient . . . to meet the human desire for truth and justice.”⁷¹

61. *Id.*

62. *Id.*

63. *Id.*

64. Richard John Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist* 43 (Doubleday 1992); see also Novak, *supra* n. 54, at 135.

65. *Id.* at 148.

66. Novak, *supra* n. 55, at 17.

67. Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, *supra* n. 60, at No. 34.

68. Neuhaus, *supra* n. 64, at 49.

69. *Id.* at 58-59.

70. *Id.* at 55.

71. Novak, *supra* n. 54, at 120.

After 1989, communism did not disappear as an important force in conservative Catholic analysis, though its role was modified as world events dictated. Its status as a national security threat and a viable domestic alternative that must be avoided diminished. Instead, the fall of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe became an object lesson in the dangers of government arrogation of economic power.

The conservative viewpoint seemed to be corroborated by John Paul II's explanation of communism's demise in *Centesimus Annus*. The "fundamental error of socialism," the pope wrote, "is anthropological in nature."⁷² Communism subordinated the good of the individual person to "the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism" and maintained that the good of the person could be "realized without reference to his free choice."⁷³ John Paul's analysis of the failure of communism was tied to his criticism of the "welfare state," an excessive enlargement of government, which imperiled "both economic and civil freedom" and neglected subsidiarity.⁷⁴ Conservatives celebrated the pope's focus on freedom and, especially, his recognition of the importance of economic liberty.⁷⁵

Obviously there are many Catholics who take conservative policy positions while ignoring the exhortations of Catholic social teaching concerning the universal destination of material goods, the preferential option for the poor, solidarity, and the common good. But that there are many conservative Catholics who are dedicated to these principles should no longer be in dispute. Surveys and studies have indicated as much. Progressive Catholic Peter Steinfels, commenting on one study, put the salient point aptly enough in a 1999 column in the *New York Times*: whether conservatives are "right in their prescriptions for relieving poverty is a question distinct from whether they are anti-poor. . . ."⁷⁶

Steinfels' allowance that the difference between Catholic conservatives and progressives might be disagreements over means rather than ends opens up the possibility of meaningful dialogue.⁷⁷ Undoubtedly, vigorous debate and disagreement between conservative and progressive Catholics on a range of contestable topics will continue indefinitely, but there may be

72. Pope John Paul II, *supra* n. 60, at No. 13.

73. *Id.*

74. *Id.* at No. 48. The Pope had already cited a "right to economic initiative" in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, No. 15 (Dec. 30, 1987) (available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html).

75. Novak integrates the idea into his discussion of liberty in *The Catholic Ethic*, *supra* n. 54, at ch. 4.

76. Peter Steinfels, *Beliefs*, N.Y. Times A13 (May 1, 1999).

77. Thomas Massaro, *Catholic Social Teaching and United States Welfare Reform* (Liturgical Press 1998) is a good example of a substantive contribution to such dialogue from the progressive side. Massaro's sophisticated application of Catholic social teaching to welfare reform never calls into question the motives of those who have opposing viewpoints. His chapters seven and nine, moreover, represent a meaningful attempt to find common ground on particular issues, an intention that the final segment of this essay shares.

some ways in which conservatives and progressives—Catholics and others—can find grounds for cooperation on issues of current import. The issues revolve around the question of the extension of market thinking into conventionally non-market realms.

Conservatives and progressives agree that the education of children, for example, cannot be totally subject to market forces. But recent experience with vouchers suggests that certain market phenomena, such as choice and incentives, can be introduced into education with beneficial results, and that support for such measures (as demonstrated in cities such as Milwaukee and Washington, D.C.) can reach across the usual conservative-progressive divide.⁷⁸

Conversely, conservatives and progressives can agree that market logic must be rolled back from areas it has illegitimately invaded, such as family life. As progressive Catholic Sidney Callahan put it in a 1984 book, abortion “corrupts the parent-child bond by emphasizing . . . the idea that parental obligations to children are intentional contracts.”⁷⁹ Along the same lines, Catholic conservative Jennifer Roback Morse, an economist at the Hoover Institution, warns that the formation of free and responsible citizens can only occur in families in which self-interested calculation is subordinated to the virtue of charity. “[T]he freer we hope to be from artificial economic and political constraints,” Morse maintains, “the more we need loving families.”⁸⁰ Conservative and progressive Catholics will probably never unite under the auspices of a seamless garment, but these examples suggest that they may occasionally find some common ground.

Conclusion

Whatever the prospects for cooperation between the two (or more) traditions in American Catholic social thought, this essay hopes to have demonstrated the force and the thoughtfulness of approaches that lay outside the progressive mainstream, which dominated episcopal conference policy circles and Catholic academia for most of the twentieth century. The best conservative Catholic thinkers have digested the teaching of the social encyclicals, taken into account their understanding of the operation of social, political, and economic life, and determined how the principles of the

78. For example, the section 527 political organization All Children Matter, bankrolled by Republican activist Dick DeVos, supported pro-school-choice candidates of both Democratic and Republican parties in the 2004 elections in states such as Florida, Wisconsin, and Colorado. On the positive impact of school choice, see Jay P. Green & Marcus A. Winters, *Competition Passes the Test*, 4 *Education Next* 66-71 (Summer 2004), and the many papers and studies of Caroline Hoxby, linked from her Web page at the economics department of Harvard University (<http://post.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/hoxby/papers.html>).

79. Sidney Callahan, *Commentary to Chapter 12*, in *Abortion: Understanding Differences* 328 (Sidney Callahan & Daniel Callahan eds., Plenum Press 1984).

80. Jennifer Roback Morse, *Love & Economics: Why the Laissez-Faire Family Doesn't Work* 4 (Spence Publ. 2001).

social teaching apply to contemporary political and economic problems. In other words, they have reflected rationally on the world confronting them and acted in ways intended to bring about a world that is more just and more respectful of the dignity of all human beings. Such is the perennial task laid before all Catholics, and all people of good will.