

Varacalli, Joseph. *BRIGHT PROMISE, FAILED COMMUNITY: CATHOLICS AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ORDER*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001. 152 pp. \$26.95 paperback.

Anyone seeking to understand the causes of the devastating scandals currently plaguing the Catholic Church should look no further than Joseph Varacalli's brilliant little book, *Bright Promise, Failed Community*. The rotten fruit of a half-century's dissent from Church teachings is all there one only needs eyes to see it.

Sociologists have a well-deserved reputation for being unreadable authors. Their stiff prose and twisted logic often mask a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature. Such opaque writing normally signals a lack of clarity of thought and, sure enough, today's sociologists generally share a deep-seated longing to be part of the herd and thus exhibit a mindless devotion to political correctness and left-wing politics.

It was, then, a delightful surprise to read *Bright Promise* (newly released in paperback), which suffers from none of these defects. Varacalli, a sociology professor at Nassau Community College in New York, takes a calm and well-reasoned approach to religion and politics that makes his book both a welcome addition to Catholic sociological scholarship and a fascinating, thought provoking read for the layman.

Varacalli's major thesis one that must have occurred to all thinking Catholics is that despite being the largest religious denomination in the country, Catholics have failed to shape the American republic. As he puts it, "Contemporary Catholic America has conformed to, much more than challenged, the basically secular nature of the present American culture."

How did the Church Militant lose her moral influence? In large part, it's the failure of leadership by American bishops, a breakdown manifesting itself in today's clerical sexual abuse scandals. According to Monsignor George Kelly in his book, *Keeping the Church Catholic With John Paul II*, as the solidly orthodox American bishops who presided over the Church in the post-WWII period retired or died, Pope Paul VI relied greatly on the judgment of the liberal Belgium Archbishop Jean Jadot, who recommended many bishops who were prepared to compromise with secularism. From there, it was only a matter of time before authentic Catholicism became the watered-down gruel that results from trying to split the difference with heresy.

Consequently, Varacalli points out, dissent groups now occupy powerful positions in Church hierarchy. Even orthodox bishops find their statements and teachings twisted or ignored by specialists who disagree with their

teaching. Furthermore, some bishops take one aspect of Catholic truth corresponding to their ideological predilections (feminism, Marxism, multiculturalism, New Ageism) and ignore the Faith's other balancing truths. Many diocesan leaders have become saturated in American culture and practice the "heresy of Americanism" condemned by Pope Leo XIII in *Testem Benevolentiae*, particularly the tendency toward democratization within the Church. Finally, some are, sad to say, just plain apostates who hate historical Catholicism.

Perhaps no other occurrence precipitated the current crisis and diminution of the Church's societal influence than this change in the American episcopacy's character. Fifty years ago, approval or disapproval of Catholic bishops actually meant something: for politicians, the difference between winning and losing; for literature, television or movies, the difference between success and failure. Today, who even worries about what the bishops will say? Many are outright dissenters from Catholic teaching, attempting to refashion the Church into something of their own imagining often with suspiciously Protestant-like innovations. The consequences for the American Catholic Church from this revolt have been, to be kind, less than triumphant.

Take the recent United States Conference of Catholic Bishops meeting in Dallas to address clerical sexual abuse. Say what you will about the outcome, but collectively, the bishops came across as a timid, confused bunch, more fearful of the media than the Vatican. If the Church's ancient and solid teachings on the nature of sin and evil were ever referred to, I certainly didn't hear it. Psychology rather than theology was the order of the day in Texas.

What makes the Church's loss of influence particularly distressing is that given the precipitous decline in American moral and cultural life, with Protestant Christian influence all but entirely effaced, this country needs a strong Catholic influence now more than ever. According to Varacalli, "The 'bright promise' of Catholic America lies in the vast, ever developing, ever more sophisticated tradition of social Catholicism and natural law thinking that could, in principle, serve both as a leaven in American society and as an alternative to the currently reigning and mostly sterile philosophies and ideologies that monopolize both the thought and policies that emanate from the American public square."

Yet, the task of regaining strong Catholic influence seems so daunting. So do we give up and retreat to our caves, or is there a roadmap back to a sane world? There is a way, according to Varacalli, who says, "the required restoration of the American Republic presupposes a successful," that is, orthodox, integrated, and sophisticated [Catholic] community to serve as the carrier of Catholic social doctrine."

Thus, states Varacalli, we can start by putting our own house in order. One of the most important ways to do this is through revival of "plausibility structures," defined as "a set of supportive institutional arrangements that

provides for individuals who participate in it a sense that the message being propagated is real and of central importance." In layman's terms, plausibility structures are organizations like religious orders, schools and colleges, orphanages, hospitals, lay associations like the Knights of Columbus, and newspapers, magazines and other forms of communication. These institutions and other tangible reference points are where Catholics look in carrying out the Faith in their daily lives and help shape the character of their endeavors.

For American Catholics, plausibility structures took shape after WWI, hit their full stride in 1940s and '50s, and were severely weakened by both internal and external forces post-Vatican II. The energy and vigor of these organizations go a long way in both the proper formation of Catholics and in helping evangelize the outside culture. Ideally, these structures should support and reaffirm the Church's teaching in every aspect of Catholic lives. Without an effective Catholic plausibility structure, what shapes individuals is not "the mind of the Church" but whatever is the prevalent and defining cultural message at any given moment. Today that is a Godless secularism.

How do we regain control of our plausibility structures? Varacalli suggests that a counter-revolution (my words, not his) be approached on three levels. First, individuals and families must have a conversion of the heart, with Catholic education and evangelization geared again toward saving souls. Second, the Church's infrastructure network of organizations and complementary associations must be rebuilt by orthodox Catholics becoming active in parish and other Catholic activities. This will take intense group pressure and strong institutional support from Rome but is absolutely essential in restoring authentic Catholicism to the Church's plausibility structures.

Finally, the culture at large can be changed by reinfiltrating key idea-generating sectors of American society government, corporations, mass media, education, entertainment, and others with well-catechized Catholics. Further, with their newly regained "plausibility," Catholic institutional structures which have provided the proper formation of armies of Catholic individuals and groups can then perform their tasks of enculturation, evangelization, and character formation in civil life.

Varacalli argues that the reassertion of authentic Catholicism must always be guided by the Magisterial authority, and each of the three parts of the counter-revolution must work cooperatively with each other. By a fundamental restructuring of a decaying American civilization along lines derived from Catholic social doctrine and the natural law, not only will the Church regain her influence but our society will again bloom and prosper.

James Bemis
California Political Review

James Bemis is an editorial board member and columnist for *California Political Review* and a columnist for *Catholic Exchange's "The Edge."*

Smant, Kevin J. *Principles and Heresies: Frank S. Meyer and the Shaping of the American Conservative Movement*. Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002. 425 pp. \$29.95 hardcover.

The resurgence of political conservatism after World War II was a complex social and political movement that had a significant impact on public policy and electoral politics. Given this complexity and impact, this movement is worthy of greater study than it has hitherto received. Smant makes an excellent contribution to the growing literature on American conservatism in this thoroughly researched and thoroughly readable work, which is the first book-length treatment of Frank Meyer (1909-1972).

American conservatism is generally regarded as having had three main components in the late 1940's and 1950's: traditionalists, devotees of free market economics, and anti-communists. It was also a movement made up of intellectuals, organizational leaders and activists, and those engaged in electoral politics. There was religious diversity within the conservative movement as well. It included both Protestants and Catholics, and to lesser degree Jews and those with no religious practice. William Buckley, Russell Kirk, and Willmoore Kendall were among the Catholics prominent in the early days of Post-WW II conservatism.

Meyer, while not as well known as other luminaries of American conservatism, is suited for serious study because, more than just about anyone else, he had strong ties to and an interest in anti-communism, traditionalism, and free market economics. The primary intellectual project of his life was to draw together the tenets of free market economics and traditionalism, an approach that came to be known as fusionism. Moreover, Meyer was something of a public intellectual for conservatism, authoring books and serving as an editor at the flagship publication of the conservative movement, *National Review*. He was, to a lesser degree, a movement activist through his work as a founding board member of the American Conservative Union, and he had some involvement in the electoral politics through his work with the Conservative Party in New York state. Meyer also represents the religious diversity within conservatism, as he came first to the movement as a non-observant Jew. After much soul-searching, he converted to Catholicism at the end of his life. In fact, he was received into the Church on Holy Saturday, April 1, 1972, just six hours before his death.

The chapters in the work describe episodes within this life that are often thematic and provide insight into both Meyer's life and thought and into the conservative movement. For example, there are chapters discussing the

Goldwater candidacy, Vietnam, the Civil Rights movement, and the Nixon presidency.

The book begins with two chapters that briefly recount Meyer's early life in New Jersey and his education in Great Britain. While studying at Oxford in the early 1930's, he joined the British Communist Party and served as activist there while a graduate student at the London School of Economics (LSE). After being kicked out of the LSE, he returned the US to work as a Communist Party USA organizer in the Midwest. He became disillusioned with communism and finally rejected it in 1945. A spirited man, he became a committed anticommunist in the late 1940's and conservative writer by the early 1950's. Smart describes his conversion to conservatism as having been brought about, in part, by the reading of Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, a widely influential defense of free markets; and Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequence*, a significant book by a traditionalist conservative. He started his work in conservatism as a contributor to several journals of opinion.

In several chapters, Smart considers Meyer's involvement with *National Review* (NR), which was established in 1955 by William F. Buckley and became a prominent voice for the conservative movement. He describes Meyer's work as the book editor and some of the controversies surrounding his reviews and interactions with writers. Smart's account of Buckley's editorship is quite interesting. Smart describes serious thinkers and passionate men at work in the shaping of a movement. The most interesting chapter looking at episodes within the life of NR is the chapter discussing the criticism of the John Birch Society, a fast growing and extremist conservative organization prominent in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Smart not only describes the articles criticizing the JBS, but he is able to reconstruct the reasoning behind the timing of the articles and show the significance of NR's editorial stand for the entire conservative movement.

There is a particularly good account of Meyer's most significant book, *In Defense of Freedom*, published by Regnery in 1962. Smart carefully describes Meyer's attempt at fusionism. Meyer's attempt to combine elements of capitalism and traditionalism is a serious project and is a political teaching that has been influential in modern conservatism. In fact, Ronald Reagan's conservatism could be called a popular version of Meyer's fusionism.

Another theme in the work is the tension between realism and idealism in political activists. Smart describes Meyer in most cases as an idealist and unwilling to make pragmatic compromises. James Burnham, another *National Review* editor, is often presented as a political realist wishing to win elections, rather than suffer quixotic defeats. This theme is particularly evident in the chapter looking at the conservative movement and the Nixon campaign of 1968. In this case, Meyer uncharacteristically acts the realist in endorsing Nixon as better than other available candidates.

The final chapter sheds light on his Christian conversion and considers the larger impact he had on the conservative movement. Using personal letters and accounts from family members and friends, Smart shows a man who struggling with precepts of Christianity while cancer is ravaging his body. Smart also shows the significance of Meyer for later conservative thinkers and activists.

Smart's work is an excellent look at a developing social movement, a movement that was attractive to many Catholics, and the role of a thinker and activist within that movement. Catholic readers will also be attracted to a story of a man drawn toward the church.

Michael Coulter
Grove City College

Mauceri, Joseph M., M.D. *Ethics and Human Life*. Foreword by John Cardinal O'Connor. Chicago: Midwest Theological Forum, 2001. 134 pp. \$12 paperback.

In his foreword to *Ethics and Human Life*, John Cardinal O'Connor uses the language of Pope John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae* to describe Dr. Joseph M. Mauceri as among the "guardians and servants of human life," as one who has committed himself as a physician to "absolute respect for human life and its sacredness." "The Gospel of Life serves a double function," His Eminence continues, "not only to critique and retard the 'culture of death,'" but also to build up the 'culture of life.' Dr. Mauceri responds to both calls in his work *Ethics and Human Life*."

The Kingston, New York physician, who shares with his late father also a medical doctor an almost legendary reputation as a Catholic caring for the sick and the poor, in his discussion of euthanasia and the "Culture of death" writes with a refreshing and disarming forthrightness about Modern man's, and his own, predicament. "In a world without God and redemption, euthanasia would be ethically right. If life

has no meaning beyond the grave, and the least amount of pain or suffering is the goal of life, then euthanasia becomes a heroic act.

Judaism and Christianity end the debate on euthanasia, not by any argument of the natural, but rather by the reality that life is destined for the supernatural. I can say to you that if I did not believe the Christian revelation on death, resurrection, and the value of prayerful endurance in suffering, I would already have my own euthanasia cocktail at my bedside, just in case! (67)

As a physician with wide experience in caring for the terminally ill, Dr. Mauceri warns us that if permitted "euthanasia by choice" will become willy-nilly "euthanasia by stealth;" and this historically literate physician invokes the Nuremberg Code written against the Nazi doctors who went down this slippery slope before. In support of the claim that it can happen again—and indeed is happening Dr. Mauceri points out that in 1999 "nearly 2,000 Dutchmen were euthanized without their foreknowledge or consent" (69). Moreover, euthanasia is corrupting medical education by introducing "great moral ambiguity" into the formation of health care providers, who are expected to guard life and take life at the same time. "We are saying that, ultimately, death has no power over life. Death, too, is subject to Christ, Who died for us" (85).

Dr. Mauceri, a bioethicist with the Holy sees Mission to the United Nations and a co-worker of the Missionaries of Charity, provides an even more telling objection against euthanasia and opens a new vista on the often decisive witness of the dying in the Mystical Body of Christ. Euthanasia is "an immoral intrusion into spiritual time."

Many dying patients have a profound experience of God, peace, and reconciliation hours, days, or even weeks before they die. These experiences are neither drug induced nor psychotic fugue states. They are moments of intense awareness; in fact, their very intensity often interrupts otherwise confused or lethargic states. Unlike the well-popularized "near death" experiences of those who did not leave us, these patients leave with deep peace, and they bequeath a great consolation to their loved ones. In every case with which I am familiar, euthanasia would have prevented the experience by premature killing of the patient (70).

"If, you might say, that is of no consequence since they are dead in any case," Dr. Mauceri continues, "the loss of their consolations would be a grievous loss for those of us who wait!"

Symbolically, Dr. Mauceri's office in Kingston, New York is adjacent to St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church. For, "Sacramental Healing" (one of the finest chapters in the book) is the key to any Catholic psychotherapy. Catholic psychotherapy, he says, is really the "life of the Church at prayer" (103). The

Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the "ultimate Catholic moment" of the Eucharist and its translation from Divine Liturgy into life, "can mend the world Jesus is not simply the roan of history, but is "the living bread come down from heaven"(John 6, 33). "Every Catholic must live from this bread and each day must be a meditation on this reality. If 'Jesus saves' is the heart of the Gospel, that saving act rescues us in the here and now, in all of the anxieties and sufferings of human life. God does not always remove these or lighten them, though He may do both, but He does strengthen us to meet them" (103, 98-99).

Some years ago I wrote on another Christian physician, Dr. Benjamin Rush (1746-1813), who was also a Signer of the Declaration of Independence and is regarded today as the Founder of the American Psychiatric Association. Like Dr. Rush, Dr. Mauceri is in love with God and neighbor (the greatest Commandment). Unlike Dr. Rush, who was in the Protestant tradition and apparently never came to accept the Sacraments, Dr. Mauceri not only recognizes the healing power of the Sacraments but incorporates them into his medical practice.

The final chapter in *Ethics and Human Life* is on "Stem Cells" in which the author treats of cloning and "therapeutic nihilism." "Our DNA is the DNA of God, and we will destroy ourselves only if, by manipulating His creation, we think we have become like Him. I had always hoped that by the arguments of honest science and the first principles of perennial philosophy that right reason would prevail. I see now that in the last analysis, it is a fight for God. We are invading God's dominion in the same way that our first parents sought the knowledge of good and evil. Will the last men be those who seek dominion over the knowledge of life? Perhaps very soon we will know" (125).

Ethics and Human Life is a book for every health care provider and layman to ponder. It is written by a physician of profound Catholic conviction who is not afraid to carry the healing truth about Christ and His Church into the sick rooms of our world.

In the end, Dr. Mauceri calls upon each of us, in the words of Moses to the people of Israel, to make a choice between the "culture of death" and the "culture of life" which are set before us; between "the blessing and the curse:" "...Choose life so that you and your children might live!" (Deut. 30, 19)

Donald J. D'Elia
Professor of History
State University of New York, New Paltz

Chesterton, G.K. *The Outline of Sanity*. Norfolk, Virginia: IHS Press, 2001. 183 pp. \$14.95 paperback.

One of the most promising recent developments in the Catholic publishing world is the appearance of IHS Press, which says it is "dedicated exclusively to the social teachings of the Catholic Church." It is evident that IHS Press, like the Society of Catholic Social Scientists, means to be faithful to all of the principles of the Church's social teachings, instead of just the ones that conform to some predetermined secular ideological perspective. IHS's early publishing efforts are aimed at bringing back into print some of the classics of Catholic social thought. From there, it hopes to publish new works. One of its first efforts was the re-publication of this book by one of history's greatest Catholic writers in the English language.

The Outline of Sanity is Chesterton's main book-length work expounding the economic perspective called distributism. While distributism is dismissed by some as a quixotic, back-to-the-land movement, this book makes very clear that it is a reasonable, profound, and much more encompassing perspective than that. The book fits in well with the major works of other thinkers that comprise a school of thought that might best be labeled "humane economics." (Actually, it is somewhat inapt to call it a "school," which suggests just one opinion among many, because so many of its precepts and conclusions are based closely on the nature of man itself.) In Chesterton's time, there was Fr. Heinrich Pesch, S.J., the developer of the solidarist system of economics and author of *Ethics and the National Economy*, the main short summary of his much more voluminous writing. There was also *The Restoration of Property*, by Chesterton's distributist colleague and intellectual twin, Hillaire Belloc. Later, one thinks of *A Humane Economy*, by Wilhelm Roepke, a Lutheran who acknowledged his debt to the papal social encyclicals, and *Small is Beautiful*, descriptively subtitled *Economics as if People Mattered*, by E.F. Schumacher. Each of these writers, in varying degrees and with different levels of systematization and theoretical analysis, sought to propose economic principles and practices in light of Catholic social teaching and the natural law.

While different ones of the above writers developed their perspective more thoroughly and stressed certain elements more than others, we can identify a common thread that defines "humane economics." Most central is the notion that the economy exists for man, not man for the economy. It must address human needs and satisfy human wants, and must foremost be oriented to the good of the whole man. While the immediate concern of economics, of course, is man's temporal good, it must always uphold his fundamental dignity

that is based on his spiritual dimension. Beyond this, and in furtherance of this mission of economics, humane economics tends to stress the following: the value of small-scale enterprise, and of smallness in general whenever feasible in human institutions; the necessity of as wide a distribution of private property as possible, both so men can develop the virtue that private property requires and so they can sustain their temporal needs and freedom; the fact that economics can in no way be a utilitarian or instrumentalist undertaking, but must be grounded in sound morality; that economics cannot be abstracted from other fundamental areas of human existence, such as, besides the moral, the religious, social, cultural, and political; that man must be taken as he is, and that economic activity must proceed from the abilities, talents, and resources that individual groups of men have at their disposal, instead of trying to impose some mega-structure which they are ill-equipped to handle and which leaves many dispossessed; the dignity and value of honest labor; the dangers of materialism and consumerism; and, in general, that man himself—his physical abilities, his intellect, and his creativity is the greatest resource.

Some of the particular themes that appear in *The Outline of Sanity* are: the evils of monopoly; the intrinsic problems of the divergent but related doctrines of liberal economics (which Chesterton simply calls somewhat inadequately, I believe "Capitalism") and socialism; the functional servitude engendered by modern industrial civilization; the necessity of rebuilding a peasantry (in the original sense of the word); the defense of the practicality of distributism against those who claimed that it was a visionary scheme (and an effective retort to the claim that liberal economics is practical); the character of a distributist political society; the legal changes that would be needed to secure and maintain distributist principles; the role of nationalization (about which Chesterton may be too sanguine) and guilds in a distributist political society; the folly of social engineering schemes which claimed to tell the simple poor folk how they really wanted to live; the political virtues that can stem from country life; the folly of the cult of the machine (as opposed to a proper use of technology); the possibilities the development of the automobile had for restoring individuality in a conformist culture (he might not have been satisfied with its long-run effect, however); and the essentiality of tying economic life to man's ultimate spiritual destiny.

Many of Chesterton's observations address and apply to conditions in the England of the first third of the twentieth century when he wrote. (The book was originally published in 1926, although the different chapters had previously been published as essays and articles.) Many nay, most of these observations, however, have a wider application, like those of all the humane economic writers mentioned above. IHS Press provides a helpful preface which gives an overview of Chesterton's points and suggests how they apply in the present day. Obviously, when one reads Chesterton one has to be content with the digressions and winding explanations and discussions which he often

uses to make his points. One also has to have some acquaintance with the historical conditions and personalities he alludes to in order to sufficiently appreciate his arguments. (To this end, the brief explanatory footnotes added by IHS Press are helpful.) Chesterton's wit and rhetorical jousts more than make up for such inconveniences, however. IHS Press is to be congratulated on its founding and its achievement in bringing a masterpiece of Catholic social literature back into print.

Stephen M. Krason
Franciscan University of Steubenville

George, Robert P. *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion and Morality in Crisis*. Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2001. 387 pp. \$24.95 hardcover.

This book consists of sixteen essays by Princeton Professor Robert P. George, addressing the most pressing public issues of our time, including: marriage, euthanasia, public morality, the nature of the state, abortion, embryo destruction, and the relevance of natural law. It is the author's expressed intent that each essay be able to function alone and also be accessible to the generally educated, non-specialist reader. Scholars will benefit from the forty pages of notes at the end of the book which refer the reader to detailed philosophical defenses of the propositions set forth in the text. The inclusion of an index helps to integrate and interrelate the essays to each other and increases the value of the book as a whole.

Professor George's goal in this volume is to "show that Christians and other believers are right to defend their positions on key moral issues as *rationally* superior to the alternatives presented by secular liberals." George's criticism of "secular liberal views is not that they are contrary to faith; it is that they fail the test of reason" (xiv). The secular orthodoxy, of course, holds just the opposite in promoting the "myth that there is only one basis for disbelieving its tenets: namely, the claim that God has specifically revealed propositions contrary to these tenets" (6). In subjecting the conclusions of the secularist academy to rational scrutiny on a variety of subjects including same sex marriage, abortion, and human rights George outlines the rationally indefensible assumptions that underlie these propositions and subjects them to devastating critique. Those assumptions include the notion that bodily life is

merely instrumentally valuable; a metaphysical person-body dualism; a denial of free choice; and a moral relativism that makes implausible any attempt to ground human rights or answer the question, "why should I respect the rights of others?"

Not content to debate against straw men and constructed arguments, George includes exchanges with his critics. One, with James E. Fleming, Professor of Law at Fordham University, on the nature of natural law and the role it should play in American jurisprudence, illustrates the contemporary state of the question. There is also a debate with Josh Dever, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, a self-described "atheist, liberal and a philosopher" who admits to being "as likely as anyone to qualify as a proponent of Robert P. George's secular orthodoxy" (21).

Secular liberals are not the only ones to trade on the alleged irrationality of traditional morality. The putative conflict between faith and reason is often cited by Catholics and other Christians to justify their dissent from traditional Church teaching. This error plays out in at least two different ways. Some claim that their conscience, informed by the secular arguments for, say, same-sex marriage, requires that they dissent from the Church's teaching. George persuasively argues for the rational superiority of the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of marriage as a union between a man and one woman and against the rationally indefensible assumptions that underlie the same-sex marriage project. Given a level playing field, reason and rational argumentation are on the side of traditional morality.

Others, such as Mario Cuomo, are "personally opposed" to abortion but argue that they cannot impose their religious and moral beliefs on others (245). The assumption is that the only reason anyone could oppose abortion is based on (irrational) religious faith. Inherent in the "Cuomo position" is the supposition that the traditional moral teachings of Christianity are incompatible with reasoned public discourse. One may accept them on faith because the Church teaches it or the bible says so but the possibility of accepting the church's teaching as, all things considered, the most rational and reasonable position is ignored.

In addition, I might add that, if the Church is what she claims to be, then the *fact* that she teaches X (a given moral or theological proposition), is an inherently strong argument for believing that X is true. Those who deny X, in the face of the Church's teaching, are also implicitly denying that the Church is what she claims to be. In this way the conclusion of an argument from authority (you should accept X as true because the Church teaches it) can be a requirement of logic and reason, not blind faith.

The modern prejudice that faith and reason are inherently contradictory categories survives in spite of the work of John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio*. This book can be viewed as an extended application and implementation of that encyclical. Robert George is one of the most prominent and important

Catholic public intellectuals of our time. If you are looking for one volume to inform and arm you to engage intelligently the crucial public debates of our day, read this book. Professors looking for graduate or undergraduate syllabus material will find a treasure trove in this volume.

Nicholas C. Lund-Molfese, M.A., J.D.
The Integritas Institute for Ethics
John Paul II Newman Center
University of Illinois at Chicago

Kass, Leon. *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002. 313pp. \$26.95 hardcover.

Over the past several years, a number of biotechnologies have inspired serious ethical and political debates: the human genome project, stem-cells, general embryonic research, and human cloning, to name a few. While other political matters such as the threat of terrorism currently dominate our political discourse, there can be little doubt that these biotechnological issues will have an enormous long-term impact.

As a result, vast amounts of human thought, energy, and resources are put into navigating a political course for such technologies. Think-tanks hire scholars solely to research these issues. All the major news organizations cover the technologies almost weekly. Large numbers of scientists and professionally trained "bioethicists" are asked to comment for magazines, newspapers, and radio programs. Corporations and states hire consultants to consider the costs and benefits of research into and use of new technologies. Even President Bush himself spoke about the ethics of stem-cell research in a televised address to the nation. Biotechnology is here to stay, and will most likely continue to force an ongoing political dialogue for years to come.

Enter Leon Kass. A longtime professor at the University of Chicago and co-founder of the Hastings Center, Kass was asked in 2001 to advise President Bush on the ethics of stem-cell technology, and thereafter was named chair of the President's Council on Bioethics. Kass was trained as a physician and biochemist, and has written extensively on bioethics for over thirty years, covering a wide range of culturally significant medical technologies, from in-vitro fertilization, abortion, and organ transplantation to stem-cell technology

and human cloning. His newest book, *Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics*, is the culmination of decades of careful consideration in such matters.

Despite his unique qualifications as an expert in bioethics, Kass is not a typical "bioethicist." Indeed, he avoids that term in self-description. Professional bioethicists, who are in increasing demand as consultants to hospitals and research organizations, typically frame ethical dialogue in terms of beneficence, respect for persons, justice, and patient autonomy. Criticizing the limitation of these principles outright, Kass exposes their meekness both in theory and in use, noting that, under their guidance, "the possibility of willing dehumanization is out of sight and out of mind."

The potential dehumanization resulting from increasingly competent biotechnologies unleashed by "woefully inadequate" bioethical principles is Kass's central concern. Both our biotechnologies and our bioethics get their guiding light from the individualism intrinsic to modern liberal democracy specifically and Enlightenment principles generally. The political thought of Hobbes, Locke, and the founders of American democracy is in some fundamental respect wedded to the scientific "relief of man's estate" espoused by Francis Bacon and others. Though this combination makes for "healthier, longer, freer, safer, and more prosperous lives" than ever before, the excessive commitment to liberal individualism, inherent especially to the modern notion of autonomy, eventuates in loss of human dignity. Kass warns that eugenics, psychopharmacology, the buying and selling of organs, cloning, euthanasia, and the unchecked use of nascent human life for research, all risk a dangerous and dehumanized "posthuman future," to be avoided at all costs. In short, biotechnology, "threatens human flourishing precisely because, in the absence of countervailing efforts, we may use the fear of death, our various freedoms and rights, and our unrestrained pursuit of profit and pleasure in ways that will make us into human midgets."

Such dehumanization through technology is highly reminiscent of Aldous Huxley's classic, *Brave New World*. Kass frequently uses this work as a warning:

As Aldous Huxley made clear in his prophetic *Brave New World*, the road chosen and driven by compassionate humaneness paved by biotechnology, if traveled to the end, leads not to human fulfillment but to human debasement. Perfected bodies are achieved at the price of flattened souls. The joys and sorrows of human attachment and achievement are replaced by factitious ecstasies that come from pills. Procreation is replaced by manufacture, family ties are absent, and people divide their time between meaningless jobs and meaningless amusements.

The slippery slope of individualistic liberal democracy wedded to modern natural science culminates in a society of "homogenization, mediocrity, trivial pursuits, shallow attachments, debased tastes, spurious contentment, and souls without loves or longings."

How do we steer clear of such debasement? Kass answers that liberal, rights-based solutions in bioethics ought to be replaced by a compelling interest in the sanctity of life and human dignity. Though some modern interlocutors in bioethics, namely Catholics, have consistently grounded thought and action in a principle of dignity, Kass's vision of dignity is rather distinct. Questioning modern natural science's reductionistic tendencies, Kass calls for a deeper, richer biology, cognizant always of the human organism as a purposive whole. He requests recognition of "what it means to be a human animal, in our bodily, psychic, social, cultural, political, and spiritual dimensions." This understanding is grounded, not necessarily in a religious position though Kass is friendly to religious skepticism of science but rather a renewed Aristotelianism, a revived scientific interest in questions regarding the teleology of the human soul beyond the mere workings of natural selection or reductionistic materialism. Such thinking, Kass argues, helps one grasp the ethical importance of human dignity beyond mere "autonomy," "beneficence," or even "justice." Human dignity is a principle modern science and ethics fail to appreciate sufficiently.

Having exposed the limits of liberalism and grounded political and ethical discourse in dignity, Kass sets off to discuss all the major biotechnologies of the day. He warns of the capitalistic tendency to reduce embryonic life to "raw material for human use, exploitation, and commerce." He defends the "public disquiet" and natural repugnance society feels toward genetic screening and genetic engineering. He criticizes current proposals to establish markets in organs for transplantations, and cautions us always to consider the nature of human organisms as whole, embodied beings. He continues his critique of the "perversions of a rights-based approaches to all moral questions," arguing that a "right to die" is fundamentally oxymoronic, and that human dignity works more humanely than liberal principles as a useful guide in dealing with death. He urges us mentally to push our biotechnological tendencies to their limits, realizing that we wish to stop at nothing short of an artificial immortality made possible by our own misguided human making. And perhaps most important to current political discourse, he urges us to consider children and embryos as mysterious natural gifts, and, in the name of human dignity, recommends as he did as chair of the Council on Bioethics a legislative ban on human cloning.

Someone once referred to Leon Kass as the "Nestor" of Bioethics, and these days this seems an ever-pregnant metaphor for his work. If, through his leadership on the President's Council on Bioethics and through writing works like this, Kass has successfully persuaded the scientific community and congress

to ban dangerous biotechnologies such as human cloning, then he has done more than simply cool a raging Achilles. He has, in fact, brought Achilles over to Agamemnon's side. What's more, he has done it in the grand Nestorian style: by reminding us to heed ideas and people from a bygone age. Through an appeal to the lost but not forgotten virtues of humanity, civility, and most importantly dignity, he has, with hope, elevated forever the discourse of warring factions in the debate over biotechnology.

Rob Schebel
Des Moines, Iowa