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ARTICLE

Mapping the Influence of Conservative Catholic Political Thought on the American Right

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Abstract: *The second Trump administration has ushered in a new wave of antiliberal, antidemocratic, antipluralist, and authoritarian politics. This article helps explain how these ideologies are informed by conservative Catholic religious and political thought, and how they reflect a vision of the state modeled on the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church. Once a fringe worldview adopted by Catholic integralists, right-wing communitarian politics has gone mainstream. To explain how this has happened, this article traces the development of conservative Catholic political thought in the United States over the past seventy-five years. It begins by contextualizing Catholic beliefs and the place of Catholics in American history. It then proceeds to an examination of key conservative Catholic thinkers and developments in conservative Catholic political thought in the United States from the 1950s onward. It touches on the anti-Communist crusades, William F. Buckley and* The National Review*, and the transformations initiated by the Second Vatican Council during the middle of the twentieth century. It proceeds to an examination of the influence of the Catholic New Right and the "theocons" associated with the magazine* First Things*, who shaped conservative politics in the 1970s and 1980s. Moving into the 1990s, it examines the natural law turn in legal thought and explores the influence of conservative Catholic thought on contemporary legal reasoning and the composition of the federal judiciary. The article concludes by assessing the resurgence of communitarian and integralist Catholic thought in the 2000s, focusing on the "postliberal" turn expressed by thinkers like Patrick Deneen and Adrian Vermeule. Across these periods, it highlights three consistent hallmarks of conservative Catholic political thought: authoritarianism, illiberalism, and communitarianism.*

Keywords: authoritarianism, postliberalism, conservative Catholicism, American political thought, integralism, communitarianism.

As the 2024 presidential election season drew to a close, Donald Trump's campaign reached a new fever pitch, with surrogates expressing a dizzying array of antidemocratic, racist, xenophobic, and misogynistic messages. In the fray, one might have missed Tucker Carlson's remarks at a Turning Point Action campaign rally for Trump in Duluth, Georgia, on October 23. But they are worth highlighting, as they capture an

inflection point in American right-wing political discourse. Amping up the crowd for Trump, Carlson ranted:

> There has to be a point at which Dad comes home. . . . Dad comes home, and he's pissed. Dad is pissed. He's not vengeful, he loves his children. Disobedient as they may be, he loves them. . . . But he's very disappointed in their behavior and he's going to have to let them know. . . . And when dad gets home, you know what he says? . . . "You've been a bad little girl, and you're getting a vigorous spanking right now. . . . I'm not going to lie. It's going to hurt you a lot more than it hurts me. And you earned this. You're getting a vigorous spanking because you've been a bad girl."[1]

Trump has leaned into the role of patriarch in chief. By the summer of 2025, following a comment made by the NATO secretary general that seemed to refer to Trump as "daddy," Trump began selling T-shirts emblazoned with an image of his glowering face, accompanied by one word: "Daddy."[2]

We would be mistaken to read Carlson's rant as mere figurative speech or Trump's T-shirt as a joke. While neither Carlson nor Trump is a Catholic, they embrace a politics that is informed by conservative Catholic religious and political thought.[3] It is a right-wing communitarian politics that is antidemocratic, antiliberal, and antipluralist, and envisions a state modeled on the top-down, hierarchical, and patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church. Once a fringe worldview adopted by Catholic integralists, this view of politics has gone mainstream, as evidenced by Carlson's remarks and Trump's T-shirts.

Recent media coverage, particularly centering on then–vice presidential candidate J. D. Vance's conversion to and embrace of a "postliberal" Catholicism, has shone a spotlight on conservative Catholics.[4] And yet, while conservative Catholics have played an important role in shaping the American right, they have often received rather less

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1 "Tucker Carlson Uses Bizarre Analogy of Donald Trump a Dad of Children Who Need a 'Vigorous Spanking,'" posted October 23, 2024, by Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, YouTube, 4:12, https://youtu.be/fYNrDI1dtEw?si=oeCcr2S-2qD8FTDe.

2 Kinsey Crowley, "Trump 'Daddy' Shirt with His Mugshot Is for Sale, Latest Riff of NATO Leader's Comment," *USA Today*, June 27, 2025, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/06/27/trump-daddy-merch-nato-mark-rutte/84383620007/.

3 A note on terminology: the Catholic right takes many forms, and many conservative Catholics do not explicitly identify with a particular movement. I have, therefore, adopted the broader umbrella term of "conservative Catholic" unless referring to a specific movement, such as integralism or traditionalism.

4 Elizabeth Dia, "How JD Vance Found His Way to the Catholic Church," *New York Times*, August 25, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/25/us/jd-vance-catholic-church-conversion.html. See also J. D. Vance, "How I Joined the Resistance," *The Lamp*, April 1, 2020, https://thelampmagazine.com/blog/how-i-joined-the-resistance.

scholarly attention than their evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant counterparts.[5] In mapping the development of conservative Catholic political thought over time, I aim to help fill this gap by exploring how conservative Catholic religious and political views have intellectually shaped the modern American right.

To do so, this article proceeds in two sections: The first provides an overview of the belief system and historical conditions that preceded and facilitated the rise of conservative Catholic thought in American politics. Doing so is necessary not only to identify change over time but also to lay the foundation for locating conservative political ideologies alongside Church teachings. From here, it turns to an examination of the development of Catholic political thought on the modern American right. For each decade under investigation, it highlights the influence of a particular aspect of conservative American Catholicism.

Across these periods, I highlight key developments within Catholic political thought. These include, most centrally, Catholic social teaching and the doctrines of subsidiarity and solidarity, the development of fusionist conservatism, Vatican II reforms that empowered the laity, the natural law theory turn, and common good constitutionalism. These map onto three core attributes of conservative Catholic political thought: authoritarianism, illiberalism, and communitarianism.

Drawing on primary and secondary sources, this article provides a sketch of the development of these ideas by Catholic intellectuals over the past seventy-five years. In doing so, its focus is on key lay thinkers whose ideas and work helped shape conservative Catholic thought and American politics more broadly; it is not on the institutional actions of the Catholic Church hierarchy in the US. This is not to suggest that the ideas put forth and actions undertaken by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) are unimportant or unrelated to conservative politics. They are.[6] But, while often skewing right, the USCCB is, nonetheless, bound to follow the official dictates of the Church. As such, its actions are constrained both by the hierarchy and the teachings of the Catholic Church in Rome. Such is not the case for conservative lay intellectuals, who act with considerably more autonomy and independence.

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5 For example, the following focus almost exclusively on Protestant conservatives: Sara Diamond, *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (Guilford Press, 1998); Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (South End Press, 1989); Dan Gilgoff, *The Jesus Machine* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2007); Esther Kaplan, *With God on Their Side* (New Press, 2004); William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (Broadway Books, 1996); and Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party* (Oxford University Press, 2010). On the need for increased scholarly attention to the role of Catholics in US history, see R. Scott Appleby and Kathleen Sprows Cummings, eds., *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History* (Cornell University Press, 2012).

6 Timothy A. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1991); Mary Jo McConahay, *Playing God: American Catholic Bishops and the Far Right* (Melville House, 2023).

It is worth noting that many of the most prominent Catholic lay intellectuals profiled here are converts to the Catholic faith. This raises an important question: are conservatives drawn to Catholicism, or does Catholicism breed conservative beliefs? Given that these thinkers had become politically conservative prior to their conversion,[7] it would seem the former is more likely. In short, these thinkers find important support for their conservative positions within the teachings of the Catholic Church, and they reinterpret these teachings through a conservative lens. Nonetheless, these thinkers neither speak for the Catholic Church nor do they reflect a universal interpretation of Catholic thought.

In the face of Trump's ascendence, there has been a reckoning of sorts among historiographers of the American right. For example, Rick Perlstein has taken scholars to task for overemphasizing conservative intellectuals and underemphasizing the right's more radical ideologies and movements. As Perlstein writes, "Future historians won't find all that much of a foundation for Trumpism in the grim essays of William F. Buckley, the scrupulous constitutionalist principles of Barry Goldwater or the bright-eyed optimism of Ronald Reagan. They'll need instead to study conservative history's political surrealists and intellectual embarrassments, its con artists and tribunes of white rage." I agree that more attention should be paid to fringe right-wing movements and ideologies, and I accept Perlstein's general point that scholars have erred in shoehorning the American right into a liberal framework that renders the right a part of the intellectual mainstream. My hope is that rather than falling into this trap, this article instead elucidates the radical nature of conservative Catholic thought and demonstrates that it falls outside the bounds of a liberal-democratic framework.[8]

Contextualizing Catholic Beliefs and the Place of Catholics in American History

For much of American history, Catholics occupied an uneasy position, facing hostility from White Protestant nativists for their religious beliefs and as "undesirable" immigrants. Without rehashing the Protestant Reformation, it suffices to say that on the belief front, opprobrium tended to focus on suspicion of Catholics' fidelity to the pope and fears that Catholicism was fundamentally at odds with the American political values of liberalism and democratic governance. The centrality and infallibility of papal authority in doctrinal matters were expressly articulated by the First Vatican Council (1869–1870),[9] which took

7 For a detailed account of three of these intellectuals' conversions to conservatism and Catholicism (Richard John Neuhaus, Michael Novak, and George Weigel), see Todd Scribner, *A Partisan Church: American Catholicism and the Rise of Neo-Conservative Catholics* (Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

8 Rick Perlstein, "I Thought I Understood the American Right. Trump Proved Me Wrong," *New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/11/magazine/i-thought-i-understood-the-american-right-trump-proved-me-wrong.html.

9 "Decrees of the First Vatican Council," 1869–1870, Papal Encyclicals Online, accessed November 24, 2025, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum20.htm.

place in the midst of a period (1860–1890) of massive European Catholic emigration to the United States.[10] By the end of the century, "[i]t wasn't unusual for respectable politicians to wonder aloud whether Catholics could be loyal to their adoptive country *and* to the Pope."[11]

In reality, some murkiness attends to how lay Catholics are to understand the doctrine of papal infallibility and whether it extends to papal encyclicals. "The exact assent which Catholics must give to the encyclicals is unclear," David J. O'Brien explained in *American Catholics and Social Reform*. Moreover, "the formal conditions under which papal definitions are considered infallible are ordinarily not present in an encyclical letter."[12] Setting aside the matter of how much obedience is owed to encyclical teachings, it is fair to recognize, as O'Brien did in 1968, that "Catholics are part of an international hierarchical organization designed to make them aware of the Church's teachings and to enforce its religious and moral discipline. On the surface, at least, these features distinguish Catholics from their fellow Americans."[13] Thus, the hierarchical structure of the Church—which, in the nineteenth century, had adopted a more authoritarian form as it concentrated power at the top, brooked little to no dissent, and required the obedience of its faithful—was not the only aspect of Catholicism that seemingly set it at odds with the mainstream of American culture; it was also the Church's teachings.

The Church historically viewed democracy, modernity, liberalism, and pluralism with suspicion, if not outright hostility, and it was also skeptical of unchecked capitalism. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, in response to the French Revolution, the pope "denounced the Rights of Man of 1789" and the Civil Constitution.[14] Throughout the following century, papal teachings continued to encourage Catholics to reject liberalism and to be wary of democracy. Of particular note, Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) laid the foundation for integralism, which the Catholic historian and philosopher Garry Wills defines as a "phenomenon" that "saw Catholicism as a systematic whole, each part

10 José Casanova, "Roman and Catholic and American: The Transformation of Catholicism in the United States," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 6, no. 1 (1992): 75–111.

11 Josh Zeitz, "When America Hated Catholics," *Politico Magazine*, September 23, 2015, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/09/when-america-hated-catholics-213177/.

12 David J. O'Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform: The New Deal Years* (Oxford University Press, 1968), 22.

13 O'Brien, viii. This view is further supported by the existence of pamphlets such as *The Popes and Christian Citizenship*, compiled by Rev. Francis J. Boland, CSC, PhD, 1939 (Notre Dame University Archives PALP 2/32) and *Mater et Magistra: Christianity and Social Progress: Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII with Extended Analysis, Study Group Outline, Bibliography*, edited by Donald R. Campion, SJ, and Eugene K. Culhane, SJ, 1961 (Notre Dame University Archives PALP 3/12). These pamphlets contain excerpts from encyclicals and suggest that there was an effort to ensure lay Catholics had access to papal teachings.

14 Garry Wills, *Why I Am a Catholic* (Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 186.

connected with all other parts, and therefore all of equal weight."[15] The *Syllabus of Errors* condemned the belief that "the Church ought to be separated from the State, and the State from the Church," and it denounced the idea of freedom of religion, among a host of other "false" beliefs. Pius IX also took aim at Enlightenment ideals of reason and rationalism, asserting the falsity of the belief that "[h]uman reason, without any reference whatsoever to God, is the sole arbiter of truth and falsehood, and of good and evil; it is law to itself, and suffices, by its natural force, to secure the welfare of men and of nations."[16]

Not long after, in 1878, Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical on socialism, decrying "socialists, communists, or nihilists" who "refuse obedience to the higher powers, to whom, according to the admonition of the Apostle, every soul ought to be subject, and who derive the right of governing from God." Such radicals, Leo XIII added, "proclaim the absolute equality of all men in rights and duties."[17] While reserving its most fervent criticism for communism, the Church also expressed doubts about capitalism, reflecting growing concern among nineteenth-century Catholics that poverty was a social and not individual problem.[18]

Leo XIII gave voice to these concerns in an encyclical on capital and labor, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), which the historian John T. McGreevy explains was indebted to "European Catholic social thought."[19] *Rerum Novarum* recognized that conditions of inequality were driving revolutionary fervor and urged that "some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class." Leo XIII also asserted that there needed to be checks on capitalism, for "to misuse men as though they were things in the pursuit of gain, or to value them solely for their physical powers—that is truly shameful and inhuman." The employer's "great and principal duty is to give every one [*sic*] what is just," and so "wealthy owners and all masters of labor should be mindful of this—that to exercise pressure upon the indigent and the destitute for the sake of gain, and to gather one's profit out of the need of another, is condemned by all laws, human and divine." The encyclical also endorsed the right of workers to form unions—with other Catholics.[20]

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15 Ibid., 195–96.

16 Pius IX, *Syllabus of Errors*, 1864, Papal Encyclicals Online, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9syll.htm.

17 Leo XIII, *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, 1878, The Holy See, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_28121878_quod-apostolici-muneris.html.

18 John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (W. W. Norton, 2003), 130–31.

19 Ibid., 131.

20 Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891, The Holy See, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html. Pope Pius XI reinforced the Church's support of unions in 1937 and rearticulated the call for the Church to

Rerum Novarum expressed support for the doctrine of familism, which holds the family is the foundational building block of society: "A family, no less than a State, is, as We have said, a true society, governed by an authority peculiar to itself, that is to say, by the authority of the father." The hierarchical structure of the Church is modeled in the family and vice versa. Thus, just as the authority of the Church cannot be destroyed, "Paternal authority can be neither abolished nor absorbed by the State; for it has the same source as human life itself."[21] In this way, familism encourages obedience and fidelity to a patriarchal authority figure and a hierarchical distribution of power. It therefore lends itself to male supremacist ideologies as well as authoritarianism.

It also lends itself to both a defense and a critique of capitalism. As discussed later in more detail, for conservative Catholic thinkers in the mid-twentieth century, "capitalism was justified and defended for its familism rather than its individualism, and where capitalism conflicted with familism, most believed capitalism should yield."[22] Related to this idea is the doctrine of solidarity, which articulates a notion of obligation and duty to one another on an individual, familial, and societal level. Solidarity, then, provides a framework for addressing inequality broadly, while retaining the centrality of the family as a model for caring for the community.

Additionally, the family provides a model for social organization that is supported by—and gives support to—the doctrine of subsidiarity. Broadly defined, subsidiarity is the doctrine that, whenever feasible, the state should devolve power and decision-making to the most local level. While it finds textual support in *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the principle of subsidiarity is most clearly articulated by Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931):

> 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. . . . *The supreme authority of the State ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise*

constrain capitalism, arguing that "the means of saving the world of today from the lamentable ruin into which a moral liberalism has plunged us, are neither the class-struggle nor terror, nor yet the autocratic abuse of State power, but rather the infusion of social justice and the sentiment of Christian love into the social-economic order." Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris*, 1937, The Holy See, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19370319_divini-redemptoris.html.

21 Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*.

22 Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950–1985* (Cornell University Press, 1993), 2.

> *dissipate its efforts greatly*. . . . Therefore, those in power should be sure that the more perfectly a graduated order is kept among the various associations, in observance of the principle of "subsidiary function," the stronger social authority and effectiveness will be [and] the happier and more prosperous the condition of the State.[23]

Subsidiarity, solidarity, and familism, all working together, are part of the antidote to liberal individualism and the atomization caused by modernism.

If the Church's nineteenth-century teachings challenging capitalism, pluralism, liberalism, and the separation of church and state were not enough to exclude Catholics in the United States from the ideological mainstream, Leo XIII had one more directive up his pontifical sleeve. In 1899, he drafted an apostolic letter to Cardinal James Gibbons, archbishop of Baltimore,[24] in which, according to Garry Wills, he "deplor[ed] a spirit of freedom that might loosen dependence on the authoritarianism of the church."[25] This was followed by what Wills has dubbed Pope Pius X's "reign of terror" (1903–1914), during which "Pius called Modernism not only a (vaguely defined) heresy but 'the compendium of every other heresy' (*omnium haereseon conlectum*)."[26] In short, during the nineteenth century, the official teaching of the Catholic Church effectively labeled the key ideological tenets of the American political system—liberalism, pluralism, secularism, and democracy—heretical and in need of "restoration."[27]

The sense that the Church needed to play an active role in "restoring" society was buttressed by the publication of *Quadragesimo Anno*.[28] Taken together, *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragisimo Anno* established the foundations for Catholic social teaching (CST), which emphasizes, among other things, the dignity of human life, the centrality of the

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23 Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931, The Holy See, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html (italics added); O'Brien, *American Catholics*, 18–20.

24 Pope Leo XIII, *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae*, 1899, Papal Encyclicals Online, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo13/l13teste.htm.

25 Wills, *Why I Am*, 203.

26 Ibid., 208–9.

27 An authorless pamphlet from 1927 titled *An American's Catechism on Democracy* is suggestive of how these teachings may have been transmitted to the laity. It poses the question: "But must not an intelligent American believe in Democracy?" Its answer: "Not in Democracy as the term is generally used. . . . If you have read Leo XIII's *Graves de Communi* as well as his *Rerum Novarum*, you cannot have forgotten that he did not use the term Democrat in its popular and current signification. On the contrary, he expressly warned against giving it any political interpretation." The pamphlet continues, criticizing democracy for "carr[ying] an implication that all men are equal" and undermining obedience to authority (Notre Dame University Archives PSOC 3-4).

28 Pius XI, *Quadragisimo Anno*, 1931, The Holy See, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html.

family, and the principle of subsidiarity.[29] As Anna Rowlands explains, during this time, CST emerged as both a modern doctrine, responding to historical events and political ideologies, and as "a social philosophy that refuses to fully accept a liberal settlement." CST thus "remains suspicious of a doctrine of the individual that does not give weight to the vulnerable, interdependent, self-determining, narrative character of the human person."[30] Defying simple political classification as either rightist or leftist, these principles set Catholics against the mainstream of American political ideology even as they created openings for Catholic integration into the nation-state.

It should come as little surprise that, as the twentieth century dawned in the United States, Catholics were caught between two competing and opposite poles. On the one hand, they faced pressure to assimilate, and on the other, to remain apart from American society.[31] Perhaps as a means of negotiating these contrasting demands, there was "an air of separateness on the part of the Catholic intellectual community down to and beyond World War II, an attitude of mind that had seemed to continue on a higher level the ghetto mentality that was used to describe Catholics of an earlier age."[32] Separateness served an important purpose, according to William M. Halsey, in that it sheltered American Catholics from post–World War I "disillusionment" and allowed them to cultivate an "American moralism and idealism."[33] Indeed, during the 1920s and 1930s, the "'decoupling' of Americanism and modernism" allowed for a "rehabilitation of Americanism—the renewal of American Catholic confidence in the orthodoxy of church-state separation, confessional pluralism, and religious voluntarism."[34]

Into this environment, and on the cusp of World War II, Pius XI released *Divini Redemptoris* (1937), an encyclical decrying the "imminent danger" posed by "bolshevistic

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29 While subject to revision over time, CST can currently be boiled down to seven basic principles: "respect for the [dignity of the] human person, promotion of the family, the individual's right to own property, the common good, subsidiarity, the dignity of work and workers, and pursuit of peace and care for the poor." Christopher Kaczor, "Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching," *Catholic Answers*, April 1, 2007, https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/seven-principles-of-catholic-social-teaching. See also "Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.

30 Anna Rowlands, "Mid-Century Catholic Social Teaching, 1930–1958," paper presented at the 2018 Warsaw Seminar on Catholic Social Teaching, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.sacredheart.edu/media/shu-media/catholic-studies/warsaw-conference/2018_Mid-century-Catholic-Social-Teaching-1930-1958_Rowlands_ADA.pdf.

31 O'Brien, *American Catholics*, 9.

32 John Tracy Ellis, foreword to *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment, 1920–1940*, by William M. Halsey (University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).

33 Halsey, *Survival*, 2–3.

34 R. Scott Appleby, "The Triumph of Americanism," in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Indiana University Press, 1995), 40.

and atheistic Communism, which aims at upsetting the social order and at undermining the very foundations of Christian civilization." Threading the needle between the Church's condemnation of "liberalistic individualism, which subordinates society to the selfish use of the individual," and "the collectivist mentality" required by communism,[35] Pius XI teed up American Catholics to lead the anti-communist crusades that helped shape conservatism in the immediate postwar era.

As World War II wound down, Americans started once again to get wound up about communism. While anti-communism had secular adherents, it found a deep wellspring of support among American Christians. This was all the more so the case for Catholics, who "discovered in anticommunism a means of identifying themselves with the greater American society."[36] Godless communism was pitted against God-filled capitalism, as conservatives had successfully welded together "faith, freedom, and free enterprise."[37] Both Protestants and Catholics rushed to be foot soldiers in the battle against heathen communism, and many soon found themselves taking part in anti-communist revivals or crusades. In short, to be anti-communist was to be a good Christian, which was to be a good American.[38]

On the Protestant side, the evangelical reverend Bill Graham, a "quintessential Cold War revivalist," was perhaps the best known of the anti-communist preachers, drawing tens of thousands of people to listen to sermons with titles like "Christ for this Crisis," "The End of the World," and "Will God Spare America?"[39] But Graham was far from alone. Preaching even more virulently anti-communist messages were the evangelical ministers Carl McIntire and Billy James Hargis, the activist Fred Schwarz, and the Catholics Bishop Fulton J. Sheen and Cardinal Francis Spellman, to name just a few of the most prominent crusaders.

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35 Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris*, 1937, The Holy See, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19370319_divini-redemptoris.html. Indeed, the Church's opposition to communism was so absolute, it led to support of General Francisco Franco's war against the Spanish democratic republic in the 1930s. Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, 24–25.

36 Donald F. Crosby, SJ, *God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950–1957* (University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 7.

37 Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (Basic Books, 2015), xiv.

38 Clyde Wilcox found that supporters of the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade were not consistently conservative. Clyde Wilcox, "Support for the Christian Right Old and New: A Comparison of Supporters of the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade and the Moral Majority," *Sociological Focus* 22, no. 2 (May 1989): 87–97, esp. 95. Likewise, Crosby argues that "[l]iberal Catholics, too, sought to expunge communism from American life, though they differed sharply with conservatives over the means to this end." *God, Church, and Flag*, 19. Both support the contention that anti-communism was a widespread phenomenon that transcended political and religious affiliations.

39 Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 22.

Although many, if not most, American Catholics were dyed-in-the-wool anti-communists, having received decades of Church instruction condemning communism and socialism, at the outset of the Cold War they continued to face suspicion and hostility from some Protestants.[40] Remarking on the status of Catholics and conservatives in the post–World War II period, the historian George H. Nash writes:

> To be a Catholic in these years was to occupy an uncertain position in American intellectual life; to be a conservative Catholic was to bear an even heavier burden. Perhaps, then, it is not so surprising that much of the new conservatism seemed so Catholic in composition. Both Catholics and conservatives were outsiders.[41]

Nonetheless, anti-communism went a long way in helping Catholics overcome the perception that they were less than fully American. While anti-Catholicism would rear its head briefly around John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign, the political scientist Ted G. Jelen is emphatic on this point: "What is clear is that the emergence of anticommunism as a rationale for postwar American foreign policy, and the explicit anticommunism of the Vatican, ameliorated the questioning of American Catholic loyalty."[42] In this changing landscape, a small coterie of conservative Catholics began to distinguish themselves. Among them were Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose ruthless persecution of suspected communists divided Catholics,[43] and the conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly, who had begun to make a name for herself in Republican circles by the early 1950s.[44] But perhaps no Catholic of the period had as long-lasting an impact on conservatism in America as William F. Buckley Jr.

Neither conservatives nor Catholics were to remain outsiders for much longer. As American Catholics entered the American mainstream, so too did conservative Catholic thought enter the mainstream of politics.

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40 Angela Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 48; on evangelical and fundamentalist divisions concerning ecumenicism, see Martin, *With God*, 39–40.

41 George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (1976; repr., Basic Books, 2008), 121.

42 Ted G. Jelen, "The American Church," in *The Catholic Church and the Nation-State*, ed. Paul Christopher Manuel, Lawrence C. Reardon, and Clyde Wilcox (Georgetown University Press, 2006), 76.

43 Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 37–42.

44 David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History*, (Princeton University Press, 2010), chapter 4.

The Development of Conservative Catholic Political Thought in the United States from 1950 to 2025

In 1951, a precocious young Buckley, a devout Catholic freshly graduated from Yale University, published *God and Man at Yale*, a stinging indictment of the institution.[45] According to the historian George Nash, Buckley "strove to document the monumental anti-Christian and collectivist bias which, he believed, was corrupting his alma mater."[46] In calling Yale to task for teaching its students to question Christian and free-market capitalist hegemony,[47] Buckley created his very own mid-twentieth-century *Syllabus of Errors*, detailing the supposed heresies (secularism and collectivism chief among them) taught at the school. Buckley kept up this steady drumbeat, taking liberalism to task again in his 1959 book, *Up from Liberalism*. Here, Buckley further refined the strategy of framing liberalism as the purview of elites, an argument first developed in *God and Man at Yale*.[48] This strategic framing obscured the fact that a fundamental rejection of liberalism put conservatives at odds with the country's foundations and enabled Buckley to oppose liberalism without seeming un-American, a crucial and necessary precaution for him as a Catholic in the postwar era.

Buckley was part of a burgeoning conservative movement defined by anti-communism, which included fellow Catholic L. Brent Bozell and later the Catholic convert Frank Meyer. Four years after the publication of *God and Man at Yale*, Buckley launched the conservative journal *National Review*, which "showed this intense preoccupation with communism from the start."[49] While not a Catholic publication, *National Review* amplified the voices of conservative Catholic intellectuals who were vocal in their condemnation of both liberalism and communism.

The conservative Catholic impulse away from liberalism and toward centralized, hierarchical social and political control put these thinkers at odds with libertarians and classical liberals, who favored limited government as a means of not only bolstering economic freedom but also protecting the civil liberties of the individual. As Nash explains, *National Review* "came under fire" because of its statist worldview. "It was," Nash writes, "willing to squelch civil liberties at home and engage in racist imperialism abroad in violation of the universal natural rights philosophy of the Declaration of Independence.

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45 On Buckley's Catholicism, see Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, esp. chapter 2; William F. Buckley Jr., *Nearer, My God: An Autobiography of Faith* (Harcourt Brace, 1997); Lee Edwards, *William F. Buckley Jr.: The Maker of a Movement* (Regnery Gateway, 2019); Jeremy Lott, *William F. Buckley* (Thomas Nelson, 2010); and James P. MacGuire, ed., *The Catholic William F. Buckley, Jr.* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

46 Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 212.

47 William F. Buckley Jr., *God and Man at Yale* (Henry Regnery, 1951), xiii.

48 William F. Buckley Jr., *Up from Liberalism* (McDowell, Obolensky, 1959).

49 Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, 61.

It tended to be arrogant about its Christianity and willing to merge Church and State. It exalted the community over the individual and could muster only 'lukewarm' support for a free economy."[50] Seeking to bridge these divides, Frank Meyer, a senior editor at *National Review*, sought to fashion a new conservatism, termed fusionism.

Fusionism aimed to wed the traditionalists—whom Nash describes as the "defenders of order, consensus, morality, 'right reason,' religion, truth, virtue"—to those who favored laissez-faire economics and small government—the "libertarians, classical liberals, and Old Whigs."[51] Across the pages of *National Review* and in a host of books and essays, Meyer defined conservatism in a way that largely reconciled the American political tradition with Catholic social thought. In an essay titled "Recrudescent American Conservatism," Meyer outlined the key tenets of the conservative position. Conservatism, he proclaimed, "assumes the existence of an objective moral order," rejects collectivism in favor of centering the individual within that order, is "profoundly antiutopian," opposes "state control of the economy," and "see[s] Communism as an armed and messianic threat to the very existence of Western civilization and the United States." Meyer also insisted that conservatism "derives from these positions its firm support of the Constitution of the United States as originally conceived—to achieve the protection of individual liberty in an ordered society by limiting the power of government." While far more straightforwardly capitalist than Catholic social teaching, Meyer's list—with its emphasis on an "ordered society," assertion of an "objective moral order," and recognition of the "tension between those conservatives who stress individual freedom and those who stress community as a fabric of individual rights and responsibilities"—nonetheless created space for a distinctively Catholic conservative political ethos to continue to develop.[52]

On its face, Meyer's veneration of the Constitution might seem at odds with a faith that, half a century before, had deemed Americanism heretical. However, by the 1960s, the belief that Catholicism was reconcilable with Americanism was taking root. Perhaps no one writer was more instrumental in bringing about this change than John Courtney Murray, a Jesuit priest and theologian who wrote extensively about Catholicism. Throughout the 1950s, Murray was repeatedly censored and prohibited from publishing his writings (particularly those on church-state relations) by the Catholic hierarchy.[53] But, as Wills notes, with a Catholic running for president in 1960, Murray was granted permission to publish *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition*, which "praised the American Constitution lavishly and showed just how patriotic Catholics

50 Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 265. On charges of statism leveled against *National Review*, see William F. Buckley Jr., introduction to *Did You Ever See a Dream Walking? American Conservative Thought in the Twentieth Century*, ed. William F. Buckley Jr. (Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), xx–xxv.

51 Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 264.

52 Frank S. Meyer, "Recrudescent American Conservatism," in *Did You Ever See*, 80–83.

53 Wills, *Why I Am*, 214–21.

could be."[54] Murray's endorsement of religious freedom and pluralism aligned him with liberals broadly, and with those advocating for change from within the Church during the Second Vatican Council more particularly. This, too, might seem paradoxical at first blush, but the development of conservative Catholicism in the United States was not merely a reaction to but also a product of progressive and liberalizing reforms within the Church.

The Second Vatican Council, which took place over four sessions from 1962 to 1965, marked a significant rupture in the history and doctrine of the Church. Called by Pope John XXIII, the council issued a number of magisterial documents that modernized the Church. While the reforms stemming from Vatican II were sweeping, several of the decrees and apostolic constitutions it issued are particularly significant for the development of American Catholic conservatism. Chief among these was *Gaudium et Spes*, which, Kenneth Himes writes, made "clear that there is no proper political mission for the Church; rather, its mission is religious."[55] This was accompanied by an explicit endorsement of religious freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) and Christian ecumenicism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*),[56] and a movement to de-emphasize the role of the hierarchy (*Lumen Gentium*) and empower the laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*). Taken together, and combined with the introduction of liturgical reforms that, among other things, largely replaced the Latin Mass in favor of the vernacular, the council's proclamations were broadly perceived as fundamentally transforming Catholicism.

For some, these changes were welcome, and supporters argued that "Vatican II saved the American Church by bringing contemporary Catholicism into closer congruence with American political culture."[57] For others, Vatican II was an affront and a betrayal. Seizing on the increased autonomy and space granted to the laity by the council, and in concert with some among the clergy who were critical of the reforms, traditionalist Catholic groups began to proliferate in the mid-1960s.

That conservative Catholics might criticize the Church was not an altogether new proposition. Wills recounts that, in 1960, Buckley had caused a stir by writing negatively

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54 Ibid., 218–19.

55 Kenneth R. Himes, "Vatican II and Contemporary Politics," in *Catholic Church and the Nation-State*, 23.

56 Murray had a hand in crafting *Dignitatis Humanae*, which, according to theologian Kenneth Himes, "created the condition for a new kind of Catholicism to develop, one that did not employ the state and its coercive or regulatory power to secure its public presence." Himes, "Vatican II," 25. In her careful study of the Second Vatican Council, sociologist Melissa J. Wilde also emphasizes the significance of *Dignitatis Humanae*, writing that it "was an unprecedented statement from the Church that the best form of government is one which allows people to worship as they please." Melissa J. Wilde, *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 88. See also William L. Portier, "Theology of Manners as Theology of Containment: John Courtney Murray and 'Dignitatis Humanae' Forty Years After," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 24, no. 1 (2006): 83–105.

57 Jelen, "American Church," 77.

about an encyclical, and that, in 1961, Buckley and Wills alongside others at *National Review* publicly scorned *Mater et Magistra*, an encyclical that reinforced Catholic social teaching, emphasized the common good, and stressed the need to alleviate economic inequality. While liberals "inflate[d] the binding nature of encyclicals" in the 1950s, conservatives were more willing to question their sacrosanctity.[58]

After Vatican II, both liberals and Catholics alike were free to express skepticism, but conservatives remained at the fore of rebelling against Church authority in the name of tradition. This trend was exemplified by the Catholic Traditionalist Movement (CTM), founded by Father Gommar De Pauw in 1965.[59] The CTM was just one of several lay Catholic groups to form in response to Vatican II, but it helped spark a spirit of rebellion among politically and religiously conservative Catholics, such as the New Right political entrepreneur Paul Weyrich.[60] Another significant breakaway occurred in 1966 when Brent Bozell left *National Review* to start *Triumph*, an explicitly conservative Catholic publication.[61] *Triumph* was joined by a number of other conservative Catholic publications, including *The Wanderer* and *The Remnant*, both of which were founded in 1967.

Freed by the Second Vatican Council from adhering to a singular Catholic identity, right-wing Catholic movements and groups mushroomed. "By the late 1960s," religion scholar William D. Dinges writes, "dissent on the Catholic right had become more differentiated and ideologically rigid." Catholic traditionalists became increasingly radical in their willingness to challenge the authority of the Church. As Dinges explains, "[t]he traditionalist attack on the doctrinal integrity of the new liturgy, reinforced by similar allegations emerging from the highest sources within the church itself, rapidly shifted the focus of dissent on the Catholic right from the question of errant discipline to one of errant doctrine."[62] The significance—and irony—of this development cannot be overstated: *Liberal reforms freed conservative Catholics to challenge traditional forms of religious authority, thereby enabling them to rebel against Church doctrines and dictates in the name of upholding tradition*.

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58 Wills, *Why I Am*, 44–49.

59 Mark S. Massa, SJ, *The American Catholic Revolution: How the '60s Changed the Church Forever* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.

60 Chelsea Ebin, *The Radical Mind: The Origins of Right-Wing Catholic and Protestant Coalition Building* (University Press of Kansas, 2024), 64.

61 Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, 141; see also Mark D. Popowski, *The Rise and Fall of Triumph: The History of a Radical Roman Catholic Magazine, 1966–1976* (Lexington Books, 2012).

62 William D. Dinges, "We Are What You Were: Roman Catholic Traditionalism in America," in *Being Right*, 243.

Having laid the foundation for a new conservatism in the 1950s, conservative movements expanded alongside their progressive counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s. By the mid-1970s, the New Right, a self-proclaimed "radical" movement, had begun building institutions and organizations that would enable it not only to propel conservatism into the mainstream but also to redefine the very meaning of conservatism. While ostensibly a secular movement, the New Right was helmed by conservative Catholic leaders, including Paul Weyrich, Richard Viguerie, Garry Potter, and Connaught Marshner, who infused the movement with a distinctively Catholic worldview.[63] In some regards, New Right activists were heirs to fusionism, in that they espoused a "traditional," that is socially conservative, religious worldview. Thus, the New Right positioned itself against feminism, abortion, and gay rights. But where fusionism sought to marry traditionalism to laissez-faire economic conservatism and limited government, the New Right played fast and loose with its commitments to both limited government and unfettered capitalism.[64] Rather than acquiesce to either a libertarian or classical liberal approach to the role of government and its regulation of the economy, Catholic New Right activists recognized that the state could be used to enforce socially conservative policies.[65]

Arguably, the New Right's greatest success lay in helping to forge the larger and more prominent Christian Right movement, which came to "anchor" the Republican party beginning in the 1980s.[66] New Right activists not only devised political strategy and brokered the coalitions that formed the Christian Right; they also were instrumental in crafting the Christian Right's "pro-family" platform.[67] For devout conservative Catholics like Weyrich and Marshner, the emphasis on family and its centrality to society bears the imprint of the catechism of the Catholic Church. Likewise, the principle of subsidiarity informed New Right proposals to devolve the provision of social services away from the state.

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63 The New Right was a pioneer in the use of single-issue advocacy groups and the creation of multiple and overlapping coalitions to advance its agenda. Most of its groups and coalitions avoided overt identifications with Catholicism. A notable exception was Gary Potter's group, Catholics for Christian Political Action, founded in 1976. Prior to founding CCPA, Potter was also an editor at *Triumph* and later *Rough Beast* (founded in 1971). See Group Research Archives, Catholic Church, Box 54, Columbia University Archives. See also Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, 157–58.

64 Ebin, *Radical Mind*, chapters 2 and 3.

65 See, for example, the following New Right publications: Paul Weyrich and Connaught Marshner, *Future 21: Directions for America in the 21st Century* (Devin-Adair, 1984); The Institute for Cultural Conservatism [William S. Lind and William H. Marshner], *Cultural Conservatism: Toward a New National Agenda* (Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, 1987).

66 Daniel Schlozman, *When Movements Anchor Parties: Electoral Alignments in American History* (Princeton University Press, 2016), chapters 4 and 8.

67 Ebin, *Radical Mind*, chapter 5.

It is important, however, to note that a commitment to subsidiarity should not be equated with a complete disavowal of social services. Reflecting on his experience working in the Nixon administration, the paleoconservative Pat Buchanan gave voice to this sentiment, remarking:

> I think the Catholic faith is consistent with the kind of conservatism I believe in. You know, I'm a traditionalist, I'm a Latin mass Catholic and I hold to traditional views of responsibility. I'm not a libertarian in the sense that I think all these social programs should be abolished in any sense. I'm familiar with *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* and all of those things that influenced me in Catholic school.[68]

This position accords with that of other influential Christian conservatives of the time, particularly the theologian Richard John Neuhaus. A Lutheran until his conversion to Catholicism in 1990, Neuhaus was at the forefront of arguing that religious institutions should serve as "mediating structures" in the provision of social welfare.[69]

Read alongside other aspects of Catholic social teaching, subsidiarity does not necessarily require a weakening of the state. Rather, if the state is to serve as a tool, or an extension of the Church, it retains its coercive capacity to enforce conformity regarding the form and structure of social relations. For example, New Right "pro-family" policies reflected a move toward decentralization and local control (subsidiarity) even as they strengthened the federal government's capacity to enforce a singular definition of the family among its citizens, thereby ensuring conformity to a conservative worldview. This tracks with the neoconservative ideology emerging during the same time period, which, Melinda Cooper writes, "seeks not to dismantle the welfare state in the name of free-market economics but rather to reshape it so as to attach to it the *conservative* predispositions of the people."[70] (An important side note: Vice President J. D. Vance is a proponent of this model of advancing conservative Catholic social policy through state coercion and economic populism.[71]) That this worldview emphasized and was modeled on a Catholic tradition that stressed patriarchal control, hierarchy, and obedience to authority is no accident.

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68 Sean Salai, "Remembering Nixon's Catholic Coup: An Interview with Pat Buchanan," *America: The Jesuit Review*, August 5, 2014, https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/remembering-nixons-catholic-coup-interview-pat-buchanan.

69 Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (American Enterprise Institute, 1977), 30. See also Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (Zone Books, 2017), 284.

70 Cooper, *Family Values*, 61.

71 Jim Tankersley and Andrew Duehren, "JD Vance Pioneered 'New Right' Economics. Trump May Not Embrace It," *New York Times*, August 2, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/02/us/politics/jd-vance-new-right-economics.html.

Likewise, the New Right's dedication to electoral politics did not necessarily extend to pro-democracy sentiment. Less than three months before voters headed to the polls in 1980, Paul Weyrich proudly proclaimed while addressing a Christian Right rally, "I don't want everybody to vote."[72] On its face, Weyrich's anti-democratic position is reflective of a Republican strategy to suppress voting. But it is also reminiscent of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Catholic hostility to democratic governance, suggesting a belief that majoritarian rule is not, in fact, desirable.

Alongside the Christian Right, the New Right helped move Ronald Reagan into the White House in 1980.[73] The New Right's flirtation with populism,[74] which suggested a more complicated relationship between Catholicism and capitalism, quickly gave way to Reagan's adoption of trickle-down economics and war on welfare.[75]

One of Reagan's advisors was Michael Novak, a Catholic intellectual who frequently contributed to New Right publications, such as *Conservative Digest*, and cofounded the Institute on Religion and Democracy with Neuhaus in 1981. One part of what Mary Jo McConahay has dubbed the "theocon trinity," along with Neuhaus and George Weigel, Novak was especially instrumental in marrying Catholic conservatism to neoconservatism.[76] He did so, in part, by articulating a rationale for capitalism from a conservative Catholic vantage with the publication of *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* in 1982. As Allitt explains, Novak "believed that the free market was consonant with his faith because 'democratic capitalism' . . . is not an individualistic but a familial system, which under the rule of law, nurtures this basic unit of society and can be entirely compatible with the message of the Gospels."[77] It is also worth recalling that in *Rerum Novarum* Pope Leo XIII made a case for the compatibility of capitalism with the natural law.

Novak, then, was not so much breaking from Church teaching as selectively retaining elements of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Catholic social teaching. Well aware of Catholic critiques of capitalism, Novak presciently wrote, "the Christian churches have failed to comprehend [democratic capitalism's] inner spirit. The laity will probably have to

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72 "Paul Weyrich—'I Don't Want Everyone to Vote' (Goo Goo)," posted June 8, 2007, by peoplefor, YouTube, 0:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GBAsFwPglw. Weyrich's speech is from the National Affairs Briefing Conference held in Dallas, Texas, on August 21, 1980.

73 There are a host of excellent histories of the Christian Right that detail the movement's support for Reagan. See note 3 for recommended sources.

74 Takahito Moriyama, *Empire of Direct Mail: How Conservative Marketing Persuaded Voters and Transformed the Grassroots* (University Press of Kansas, 2023), 135.

75 Farber, *Rise and Fall*, 159–208; Michael Harrington, "The Prospects for Reaganomics," in *Party Coalitions in the 1980s*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1981), 389–94.

76 McConahay, *Playing God*, 150–52; see also Scribner, *Partisan Church*, esp. chapter 1.

77 Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, 286.

lead the way. They will encounter opposition."[78] By the mid-1980s, conservative Catholic groups, such as the American Catholic Conference, were waging open war against liberal economic positions taken by US Catholic bishops. The bishops, already opposed to the Reagan administration's nuclear policies,[79] were critical of supply-side economics and had begun drafting a pastoral letter on the economy. Eventually published in 1986 as *Economic Justice for All*, the letter urged increased government action to reduce inequality and support the poor.[80]

Prior to the pastoral letter's publication, early drafts prompted a response from the Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy, which former treasury secretary William E. Simon and Michael Novak co-chaired.[81] Reporting for the *New York Times*, Leonard Silk wrote, "In effect, the lay commission report argues that it is not government's redistribution of income that helps the poor but economic growth stemming from the imagination and investments of capitalists."[82] "The pro-market stance championed by the Lay Commission," Dennis Deslippe explains, "was significant since it required a marked confrontation with Church teachings critical of individualism and consumerism, ones dedicated to just wages, humane working conditions, and the privileging of stable family and community over profit."[83] Thus, the clash signaled a continued willingness to challenge and confront the Church hierarchy on the part of conservative Catholics in the post–Vatican II era.

Novak and Simon took a decisively postconciliar line when they charged "ecclesiastical overreaching."[84] For these conservative Catholics, the bishops were violating the Church's (thoroughly modern) commitment to refrain from politics and not insert itself into matters of the state—at least in regard to economic policy. But not all conservative Catholics endorsed either laissez-faire capitalism or the Church's retreat from politics.

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78 Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (American Enterprise Institute / Simon and Schuster, 1982), 242.

79 Eugene Kennedy, "America's Activist Bishops," *New York Times Magazine*, August 12, 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/08/12/magazine/america-s-activist-bishops.html.

80 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, 1986, accessed November 14, 2025, https://www.usccb.org/resources/economic_justice_for_all_1.pdf.

81 The Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy, "Toward the Future: Catholic Social Thought and the U.S. Economy—A Lay Letter," *Crisis Magazine*, November 1, 1984, https://crisismagazine.com/vault/toward-the-future-catholic-social-thought-and-the-u-s-economy-a-lay-letter.

82 Leonard Silk, "Celebrating Capitalism," *New York Times*, November 7, 1984, Group Research Archives, Catholic Church, Box 54, Columbia University Archives.

83 Dennis Deslippe, "For Faith and Free Markets: The Lay Commission and Conservative Catholics in the 1980s," *Journal of Policy History* 28, no. 4 (2016): 597–623, quote at 599.

84 Ibid., 604.

Indeed, particularly for conservative Catholics who were concerned with the doctrine of "religious freedom" and with so-called social issues, like abortion and euthanasia, such a neat division between religion and the state was neither necessary nor desirable.

During the Reagan years, Neuhaus became "increasingly sympathetic to the neoconservative critique of liberalism."[85] His move to the right was accompanied by the creation of the Institute on Religion and Public Life and the launch of *First Things*, a journal dedicated to "advanc[ing] a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society."[86] Concerned with "religious freedom," Neuhaus adopted an understanding that it "bestows the right to assert absolute moral law over and above federal law."[87] Indeed, the moral law became a vehicle for ecumenical coalition-building,[88] which manifested in a statement titled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." Coauthored by Neuhaus and Charles Colson, an evangelical convert, the statement sought concord in the service of advancing Christianity and combating the corrosive effects of secularism, modernism, and relativism.[89]

The moral law also served as a means by which the state could be brought in line with conservative Christianity. Fixating on matters pertaining to the family, such as premarital sex, abortion, homosexuality, and divorce, Neuhaus and *First Things* helped shift the discourse toward an examination of law and the perceived failings of the US courts.[90] This helped pave the way for a new generation of natural law theorists, which included legal scholars Robert P. George, a staunchly outspoken Catholic, and Hadley Arkes, a Jew who would later convert to Catholicism. In some ways, these scholars picked up where Charles Murray had left off in his veneration of America's founding documents. As George put it, "If *the* official act of foundation of the American regime was the publication of the Declaration of Independence—as our Founders themselves plainly believed—then at the basis of American republicanism is the explicit recognition of 'the Laws of Nature and Nature's God.'"[91] But where Murray aimed to locate a Catholic defense of pluralism and liberal democracy in relation to the Declaration, the new natural law theorists sought to make the case that the American republic was—and always should be—founded on

85 Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives* (Yale University Press, 2009), 264.

86 See the masthead of *First Things*: https://firstthings.com/masthead/ (accessed November 9, 2025).

87 Cooper, *Family Values*, 288.

88 Ibid., 291; Scribner, *Partisan Church*, 12.

89 Catholic-Evangelical Consultation, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millenium," *Eternal World Television Network* (EWTN), republished from *First Things* (May 1994), accessed November 9, 2025, https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/evangelicals--catholics-together-the-christian-mission-in-the-third-millennium-10976.

90 Allitt, *Conservatives*, 265.

91 Robert P. George, *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis* (ISI Books, 2001), 157.

Christian principles.[92] That it was not operating as such reflected a failure on the part of the courts to uphold these founding principles and center morality in the law.

There was nothing new about either the concept of natural law, which can be traced back to Aristotle and Aquinas, or conservative critiques of the Supreme Court (conservatives had long been critical of "judicial activism," and Bozell published a scathing indictment of the Warren Court in 1966).[93] But the new natural law theorists were making bolder claims about the Supreme Court's—and conservatives'—failings. The rot went much deeper, Arkes alleged, and "conservative critics obscured the problem as they complained merely about activism." A 1996 *First Things* symposium on "The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics" was, according to Arkes, a first step in correcting that error as the critique was expanded to identify how judges and the courts were "remodeling the very matrix of the laws on birth, death, sexuality, and marriage."[94] The solution, then, would be to formulate a legal philosophy to apply natural law to define the appropriate boundaries of the family and delimit what forms of social and sexual behavior would be tolerated in society. They were, in other words, inching toward an expression of church-state integration. It is perhaps no surprise that, as Allitt remarks, those associated with *First Things* came to be "known as theoconservatives by their secular brethren."[95]

Around the same time that Neuhaus was getting *First Things* off the ground, the Federalist Society, "a group of conservatives and libertarians dedicated to reforming the current legal order" that first came together in 1982,[96] was hiring the conservative Catholic activist and fundraiser Leonard Leo. Recognizing that public opinion—and democratic majoritarianism, by extension—was opposed to right-wing positions on social issues, Leo sought not to constrain the courts but to stack them.[97] Over the past thirty years, Leo has succeeded in doing just this. He has played a role in the selection, nomination, or confirmation of all six of the current Supreme Court's conservative justices. Moreover, under his watch, the lower courts have been transformed.

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92 The degree to which natural law proponents sought to explicitly tie American foundations to Christianity varied, but Scribner asserts that Catholic neocons rejected a "gauzy and vague Christian foundation for the American republic." As an example, Scribner recounts George Weigel's claim that "the American constitutional system is rooted in the scholastic, Catholic thought of the thirteenth century." Scribner, *Partisan Church*, 12.

93 L. Brent Bozell, *The Warren Revolution* (Arlington House, 1966).

94 Hadley Arkes, *Natural Rights & the Right to Choose* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 150.

95 Allitt, *Conservatives*, 265. A former editor of *First Things*, Damon Linker, made a strong case for regarding the group as theoconservatives in *The Theocons* (Doubleday, 2006). Others would dispute the ascription; notably, George asserted in a posthumous tribute that Neuhaus "loathed both theocracy and its secular equivalent." Robert P. George, foreword to *The Naked Public Square Reconsidered*, ed. Christopher Wolf (ISI Books, 2009), x.

96 "About Us," The Federalist Society, accessed November 9, 2025, https://fedsoc.org/about-us.

97 McConahay, *Playing God*, 87.

According to *ProPublica*, Leo has used "his network of contacts to place Federalist Society protégés in clerkships, judgeships and jobs in the White House and across the federal government." These court officers are the foot soldiers in Leo's campaign "to wage a broader cultural war against a 'progressive Ku Klux Klan' and 'vile and immoral current-day barbarians, secularists and bigots' who demonize people of faith and move society further from its 'natural order.'"[98] This "natural order" eschews pluralism, is governed by Catholic interpretations of the natural law, and seeks to use the undemocratic and coercive power of the courts to impose its singular vision of social, political, and economic life on the American people.

As Leo was working to transform the composition of the federal judiciary, conservative Catholic thought continued to enter the mainstream of conservative politics. Tasked with helping define "compassionate conservatism," Michael Gerson, a conservative evangelical, infused George W. Bush's speeches with Catholic social thought.[99] In 2002, Bush signed into law the Born-Alive Infants Protection Act, which Arkes helped draft.[100] While relatively modest in its scope and application, the act was a step in advancing the legal doctrine of "fetal personhood," which is premised on the Catholic teaching that life begins at conception. In 2004, *Mirror of Justice*, a Catholic legal blog, was launched to "ask whether the profoundly counter-cultural elements in Catholicism offer a basis for rethinking the nature of law in our society."[101] For over twenty years, it remained an influential platform for Catholic legal theory. In 2008, Sarah Palin, an outspoken evangelical Protestant, delivered an acceptance speech at the RNC that was written by Matthew Scully, a conservative Catholic whose "specialty was crafting Bush's pro-life message in a way that would not offend soccer moms or

98 Andy Kroll, Andrea Bernstein and Ilya Marritz, "We Don't Talk About Leonard: The Man Behind the Right's Supreme Court Supermajority," *ProPublica*, October 11, 2023, https://www.propublica.org/article/we-dont-talk-about-leonard-leo-supreme-court-supermajority.

99 "'Heroic Conservatism': A Conversation with author Michal Gerson," *Pew Research Center*, November 13, 2007, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2007/11/13/heroic-conservatism-a-conversation-with-author-michael-gerson/.

100 Arkes was credited with advancing Catholic natural law doctrine and promoting the anti-abortion cause long before his conversion to Catholicism in 2010. Christine M. Williams, "Pro-Life Leader Hadley Arkes Becomes Catholic," *The Anchor*, May 31, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20161127214831/http://209.157.64.201/focus/f-religion/2525329/posts. "Congress Delivers Born-Alive Infants Protection Act," *Life Insight: A Publication of the NCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities* 13, no. 3 (July–August 2002), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, https://www.usc, cb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/congress-delivers-born-alive-infants-protection-act.

101 Rick Garnett, "Twenty Years of Mirror of Justice," *Mirror of Justice*, February 4, 2024, archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20250912201631/https://mirrorofjustice.blogs.com/mirrorofjustice/2024/02/20-years-of-mirror-of-justice.html.

mainstream Catholics who get nervous around some of the more extreme Evangelical rhetoric."[102]

While the 2008 McCain-Palin ticket was a losing one, conservative Catholics were on a roll. The following year, the "Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience" was published. Largely authored by George, the declaration called on Christians to engage in civil disobedience to resist social decay by protecting the "unborn, disabled, and the elderly," as well as to resist heterosexual marriage and "to affirm our right—and, more importantly, to embrace our obligation—to speak and act in defense of these truths. We pledge to each other, and to our fellow believers, that no power on earth, be it cultural or political, will intimidate us into silence or acquiescence."[103] The following month, *The New York Times* profiled George, anointing him "this country's most influential conservative Christian thinker."[104] The 2000s were, in short, the beginning of a conservative Catholic zeitgeist that has only continued to gather force and grow in influence.

As conservative Catholics racked up these wins, conservative Protestants seemingly faltered. In 2007, David Kirkpatrick asserted the country was witnessing the "Evangelical Crackup," as evangelicals and fundamentalist Protestants turned against George W. Bush, and the Christian Right fractured. Conservative Christians were frustrated by the administration's failure to deliver on a socially conservative domestic agenda and disappointed with the war in Iraq.[105] Barack Obama's subsequent victory was, therefore, received as a repudiation of the Bush administration's War on Terror and its social conservatism. But, for many conservative Christians, the problem with the Bush administration was not that it had gone too far, but rather that it had not gone far enough.

Not a theocrat himself, George W. Bush opened the door for theocratic political and legal thought. To fully realize conservative Catholic political thought, the United States would need a president not committed to the principles of liberalism, pluralism, or democracy. Conservative Catholic thinkers like Patrick Deneen and Adrian Vermeule have laid the groundwork for this to happen.

In 2018, Patrick Deneen, a political theorist at Notre Dame University, published a slim book provocatively titled *Why Liberalism Failed*. In it, Deneen charged that liberalism "has failed because it has succeeded," and in succeeding, it produced broken government systems, economic inequality, and less rather than more freedom. To closely paraphrase

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102 Massimo Calabresi, "The Man Behind Palin's Speech," *Time*, September 4, 2008, https://time.com/archive/6936275/the-man-behind-palins-speech/.

103 "Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience," Manhattan Declaration, November 20, 2009, https://www.manhattandeclaration.org/.

104 David D. Kirkpatrick, "The Conservative-Christian Big Thinker, *New York Times Magazine*, December 16, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/20/magazine/20george-t.html.

105 David D. Kirkpatrick, The "Evangelical Crackup," *New York Times Magazine*, October 28, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/28/magazine/28Evangelicals-t.html.

Deneen, if the promise of liberalism has been equity, pluralism, dignity, and liberty, it has instead produced inequality, homogeneity, degradation, and unfreedom.[106] If not liberalism, what is to be done? "A better course," Deneen writes, "will consist in smaller, local forms of resistance: practices more than theories, the building of resilient new cultures against the anticulture of liberalism." What this looks like is only hinted at, with Deneen asserting that the alternative to liberalism lies in the creation of small, autonomous communities and "the cultivation of cultures of community, care, self-sacrifice, and small-scale democracy."[107] Who belongs to these communities of care—and what happens to those excluded from them—is left largely to the reader's imagination.

In Deneen's critique of liberalism we can see the shadow of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century encyclicals discussed earlier, which decried the corrosive effects of liberal individualism, secularism, pluralism, and unfettered capitalism. Caught between the rejection of individualism/liberalism, on the one hand, and collectivism/communism, on the other hand, Deneen embraces a vaguely defined communitarianism that is strongly influenced by the doctrines of subsidiarity and solidarity. This communitarianism is premised on a singular—as opposed to pluralist—vision of the good that is informed by religion and, despite the emphasis on "care," is exclusionary and coercive.

We can also identify a move toward embracing a postliberal Catholic future. What Deneen and other "Catholic postliberals" seek, as the political theorist Mark Lilla puts it, is "to establish (or reestablish) a more communitarian vision of the good society, one in which democratic institutions would in some sense be subordinate to a superior, authoritative moral vision of the human good—which for many of them means the authority of the Catholic Church."[108] This project becomes clearer when one turns to Adrian Vermeule's conception of "common good constitutionalism."

Vermeule, who converted to Catholicism in 2016 and has been labeled an integralist,[109] is a legal scholar whose 2022 book, *Common Good Constitutionalism*, presents a case for abandoning both originalism and legal progressivism as modes of constitutional interpretation. Instead, Vermeule embraces a "return" to the "classical legal tradition." Predicated in part on Roman law, and on fusing common and natural law traditions, the "classical" approach views law as "an ordinance of reason for the common good, promulgated

106 Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (Yale University Press, 2018), 3.

107 Ibid., 19–20.

108 Mark Lilla, "The Tower and the Sewer," *New York Review of Books*, June 20, 2024, 16, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2024/06/20/the-tower-and-the-sewer-why-liberalism-failed-deneen/.

109 Madeline Teahan, "There Is No Middle Way Between Atheism and Catholicism, Says Harvard Professor Who Has Converted," *Catholic Herald*, October 28, 2016, https://web.archive.org/web/20161215151148/http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/10/28/there-is-no-middle-way-between-atheism-and-catholicism-says-harvard-professor-who-is-converting/; Jason Blakely, "The Integralism of Adrian Vermeule," *Commonweal*, October 5, 2020, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/not-catholic-enough.

by a public authority who has charge of the community."[110] Vermeule couches his defense of the classical model in a careful rereading of constitutional and administrative law that, upon first glance, appears reasonable enough, which is to say it appears compatible with the US Constitution and basic principles structuring American government.

However, *Common Good Constitutionalism* promotes an explicitly authoritarian model of sovereign power as, according to Vermeule, "it reads constitutional provisions to afford public authorities latitude to promote the flourishing of political communities, by promoting the classical triptych of peace, justice, and abundance." Stated even more bluntly, its primary aim is "to ensure that the ruler has both the authority and the duty to rule well."[111] That the system he envisions is top-down is expressly stated when Vermeule writes that it "does not suffer from a horror of legitimate hierarchy, because it sees that law can encourage those subject to the law to form desires, habits, and beliefs that better track and promote communal well-being."[112] Within this hierarchical schema, all other functions of the law and society are subordinated to "promote good rule," and "constraints on power are good only derivatively, insofar as they contribute to the common good."[113] In Vermeule's hands, the law becomes a tool to both coerce and mold its subjects to conform to a singular vision of the good, reinforcing a homogenous communitarian vision of society.

Moreover, Vermeule's ideal form of law, and by extension model of the state, demands an express rejection of liberalism, individualism, and pluralism. The *common good* that Vermeule presupposes is unitary and communitarian and is seemingly defined to coincide with those values established by conservative Catholicism. This can be seen in Vermeule's rejection of abortion and support for the rights of "unborn children,"[114] his criticism of free speech and the framework of individual rights, and his support for the regulation of capitalism and the environment. If government is to function properly, it will do so with "a view to promoting solidarity and subsidiarity."[115]

Indeed, Vermeule explicitly draws on the traditions of subsidiarity and solidarity, going so far as to quote directly from *Centisimus Annus*, an encyclical penned by Pope John Paul II.[116] But Vermeule's understanding of subsidiarity is warped by his interpretation of sovereign authority, which he derives from the work of the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt. Vermeule conceives of subsidiarity through the lens of the "state of exception," which

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110 Adrian Vermeule, *Common Good Constitutionalism* (Polity, 2022), 3.

111 Ibid., 36, 37.

112 Ibid., 38.

113 Ibid., 37.

114 Ibid., 199n103.

115 Ibid., 42.

116 Ibid., 155.

"gives the public authority at the highest level of the system extraordinary power to do what is necessary for the common good, the strength of a giant."[117] The public authority, Vermeule writes, should have "the jurisdiction to act, under exceptional circumstances where the operation of subsidiary institutions fails, so as to promote the common good throughout the polity—overriding if necessary the views of any subordinate jurisdiction."[118] Understood this way, the authoritarian "daddy" conjured by Tucker Carlson is really no different from Vermeule's public authority, freed from the constraints of a secular and pluralist liberal-democratic constitutional order and empowered to spank all the bad girls. Both conceive of a sovereign authority that is more reminiscent of a Roman Caesar—or perhaps, more accurately, a Roman pontiff—and of a state structure more reminiscent of the pre–Vatican II Catholic Church than a polity governed by checks and balances.

Conclusion

In 2021, Ross Douthat, a conservative Catholic public intellectual, published a prescient article titled "Catholic Ideas and Catholic Realities." While his central contention was that the Catholic Church is in danger of an imminent "widespread structural collapse," Douthat also provided a typology of the core ideas/groups animating American Catholicism, aptly grouping Catholics into four main camps: populists, integralists, benedictines, and tradinistas.[119]

According to Douthat's taxonomy, the populists both support Trump and "believe that liberal democracy requires a strong religious politics and an alliance between evangelicals and Catholics." While hewing toward right-wing economic populism, this group remains nominally committed to the core tenets of liberalism and democratic governance even as they identify with postliberalism. A second group, integralists, seeks a "Catholic empire" and the merging of the Church with the state. Nonetheless, they also tend toward support of Trump because they "prefer illiberal nationalism to liberal internationalism." Then there are what Douthat terms the "benedictines," whom we might alternatively label communitarians. While sharing the integralists' skepticism of liberalism, they advocate for local and bottom-up reform ("institution-building from below") instead of top-down transformation. (The fourth category, "tradinistas," are Catholic anticapitalists who are not relevant to this inquiry.)

Plainly, conservative Catholics are not a homogenous group. There are disagreements concerning the separation of church and state, capitalism and the free market, and the

117 Ibid., 155.

118 Ibid., 158.

119 Ross Douthat, "Catholic Ideas and Catholic Realities," *First Things*, August 1, 2021, https://firstthings.com/catholic-ideas-and-catholic-realities/.

relationship between religious freedom and pluralism. Moreover, there is considerable overlap among these groups. For Douthat, what all of these ideas and the groups affiliated with them have in common is that they "represent attempts to intensify commitment, to forge a more fully Catholic approach to politics and culture than has prevailed since the 1960s." But he does not imagine they will succeed. Rather than viewing the heightened presence of these groups in American politics as signs of Catholic strength, Douthat worries over their ability to reinvigorate an American Catholicism that is in "decline."

Indeed, Douthat contends "it's more likely that the decline will accelerate, with multiple forces eroding the Church's institutional position over the next twenty years" as a result of a slew of challenges, including the financial and reputational pressures resulting from decades of sex abuse scandals, the rise of evangelical Protestantism among Latinx populations, changing demographics, and continuing trends toward secularism in the United States.[120] One might add that there is the potential for a schism within the Church driven by conservative Catholics' rejection of the liberal turn ushered in by Pope Francis and his successor Pope Leo XIV, who has signaled his intention to continue in this vein.[121] Thus, it is entirely conceivable that, in the coming years, we will see a marked collapse of the institutional influence of the Roman Catholic Church both in the United States and internationally.

In light of these very real and material concerns, Douthat hits on one possible scenario—(some) of these ideas may successfully gain purchase within conservative politics even as the institutional and religious influence of the Catholic Church continues to wane. It would seem Douthat's fear is coming to pass: While the number and religiosity of Catholics in the United States declines, the influence of conservative Catholic thought on American politics has never been stronger.[122]

Evidence of this abounds: The Supreme Court, with its six-person majority of overtly conservative justices,[123] all of whom were raised Catholic;[124] the vice presidency, now

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120 Ibid.

121 McConahay, *Playing God*, x. For conflict stemming from the left flank of the Church, see also Ben Munster, "Pope Francis Has Lost Control of His Liberal Revolution," *Politico*, June 24, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/pope-francis-rome-vatican-city-germany-catholics-liberal-revolution/.

122 See "2023 PRRI Census of American Religion: County-Level Data on Religious Identity and Diversity," *Public Religion Research Institute* (PRRI), August 29, 2024, https://www.prri.org/research/census-2023-american-religion/; Jeffrey M. Jones, "Church Attendance Has Declined in Most U.S. Religious Groups," *Gallup*, March 25, 2024, https://news.gallup.com/poll/642548/church-attendance-declined-religious-groups.aspx.

123 Stephen Jessee, Neil Malhotra, and Maya Sen, "A Decade-Long Longitudinal Survey Shows That the Supreme Court is Now Much More Conservative Than the Public," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119, no. 24 (2022): e2120284119, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2120284119.

124 Nomi Stolzenberg, "Religious Identity and Supreme Court Justices," *JStor Daily*, October 22, 2020, https://daily.jstor.org/religious-identity-supreme-court-justices-amy-coney-barrett/.

occupied by J. D. Vance, a convert to a traditionalist interpretation of Catholicism;[125] and Project 2025, which bears the imprint of conservative Catholic thought and is proving to be the backbone of much of President Trump's second-term agenda.[126] But the sway of conservative Catholic political thought goes beyond the direct access of conservative Catholics to the seat of American political power; it goes right to the heart of the ideologies underpinning the "new" Republican Party, which has embraced an antidemocratic politics premised on pseudopopulism, illiberalism, and antipluralism.[127]

These core ideological commitments are often described in terms that emphasize what they aim to negate, reinforcing the view that the right is reactionary. But we might be better served by shifting our focus to what they advocate for: authoritarianism, conformism, communitarianism, and familism. These -isms are, in turn, supported by the principles of subsidiarity and hierarchy, a commitment to the "traditional," and a belief in a singular conception of the common good. Taken together, these ideas promote a comprehensive vision of government and the state that is at odds with the traditions of pluralist liberal democracy in the United States. While not wholly or exclusively promulgated by conservative Catholics, the intellectual roots of these ideas can be found in Catholic social and political thought, which has been nourished and nurtured by conservative Catholic thinkers and within conservative Catholic publications over the past seventy-five years.

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125 Vance, "How I Joined"; see also Elizabeth Dias, "How JD Vance Found His Way to the Catholic Church," *New York Times*, August 25, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/25/us/jd-vance-catholic-church-conversion.html.

126 Chelsea Ebin, "The Legacy of the Catholic New Right in Project 2025," *Public Seminar*, August 26, 2024, https://publicseminar.org/2024/08/the-catholic-new-right-and-project-2025/; Steve Contorno and Casey Tolan, "Trump Said He Hadn't Read Project 2025—But Most of His Early Executive Actions Overlap with Its Proposals," *CNN*, January 31, 2025, https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/31/politics/trump-policy-project-2025-executive-orders-invs/index.html.

127 For an account of the "new" economically quasi-populist Republican Party taking shape under the auspices of Trump, see Adam Wren, Olivia Beavers, and Megan Messerly, "A New Kind of Republican Party Is Forming at the RNC," *Politico*, July 17, 2024, https://www.politico.com/news/2024/07/17/rnc-republican-party-transformation-maga-00168933.