

promoters of the visions receive lengthy treatments out of line with what common sense would say were the quality of their views. Presumably, not every reader will appreciate Christian's bias in favor of religious eccentricity over traditional piety.

Finally, what of the visions themselves? What did the visionaries see and hear? The evidence here is vast—and more than Christian can himself report in detail. It is difficult to summarize. Some visionaries were quacks and some of their supporters were mountebanks. Others are less easy to dismiss. The visions were not beholden to any one political party or view. They were not restricted to children. Most visionaries became pious after their experiences; some fell away from the Church. Many visionaries were much preoccupied with the social unrest of the Spanish Republic and some predicted an eminent chastisement. Most of the clerical leaders and Catholic intellectuals who examined the evidence concluded the visionaries were deluded and the visions fake. In the end, Christian's view is that the visionaries were ordinary people seeking the Divine. As to whether Our Lady appeared to them, he does not offer an opinion.

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Thomas R. Rourke. *A Conscience as Large as the World: Yves R. Simon Versus the Catholic Neoconservatives*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997. 287 pp.

What is the relationship between the Catholic Church's teaching on the socio-economic order and the capitalist economic system in which we live? This should be a question that interests every Catholic, particularly those Catholics who are loyal to the Magisterium, for we profess to shape our beliefs and lives according to the genuine teaching of the Catholic Church.

Today, there are many competing groups, all of whom hold themselves out as the true voice of Catholic tradition, who take various positions on this question. Among them are a group of writers, generally known as neoconservatives, whose best-known representatives are Michael Novak, Fr. Richard J. Neuhaus, and George Weigel. The neoconservatives have promoted the thesis that not only is American capitalism compatible with the Church's social doctrine, but that at long last the Magisterium has begun to recognize the insights and value of the tradition of economic thought that stems from Adam Smith—in short, that the Catholic Church has finally embraced the free market. We would do well to be skeptical of these claims. In the work, *A Conscience as Large as the World*, Thomas R. Rourke systematically considers the arguments of the neoconservatives and concludes that their positions are generally not legitimate examples or developments of Catholic social teaching. Rourke does this by counterpoising the thought of Yves R. Simon (1903-1961), a French Thomist philosopher and disciple of Jacques Maritain, who immigrated to the United States in the late 1930s and taught at both Notre Dame and the University of Chicago.

Rourke attempts to show

that the neoconservatives, precisely by their desire to defend the liberal conception, unwittingly promote the directionless freedom they rightly deplore. In addition, they would have authority abandon its essential moral role as the formulator of rules and policies that express the requirements of the common good considered materially. Finally, the "new concept" of the common good promoted by Novak is to a considerable degree an abandonment of any properly common good as Simon, Saint Thomas, and the Catholic tradition define it. (p. 3)

Thus, although he ultimately disagrees with the neoconservatives, Rourke takes their ideas seriously. Each of the four main chapters of this book (chapters two through five) begins with an extensive exposition of their thought in a particular area, followed by a consideration of Simon's thoughts on the same subject, and concluding with Rourke's own evaluation in which

he draws on Simon, Aristotle, St. Thomas, and the tradition of Catholic social thought embodied in the encyclicals of Leo XIII and his successors, especially John Paul II.

After the introductory chapter, Rourke takes up the seemingly arcane subject of practical reason in chapter two. Practical reason, as first formulated by Aristotle, is reasoning about things that must be done. It does not proceed according to clear deductions from general principles because the variables that must be considered are so extensive. Thus, practical reason is a matter of judgment and cannot provide the certain and scientific conclusions of philosophical reasoning. Practical reason is an important concept in the neoconservatives' writings. Yet, Rourke shows that, by separating practical reason from theoretical reason and natural law, Novak's and Neuhaus' notion of practical reason—and also Adam Smith's upon which it is ultimately based—divides man in two. To take one of Rourke's simple illustrations: it is a matter of practical reason *how* to avoid hitting a child who runs out in front of one's car; *that* one must try to do so is a matter of deduction from the universal truths of the natural law. If judgments of practical reason are not in some way grounded in deduction and the theoretical perception of such universal truths, they become incoherent and merely expressions of one's subjective tastes or desires. The truth of this becomes especially evident in the neoconservative approach to economics, which tends to make an undue separation between the ideal, considered as unattainable, and practical judgment about what one should do.

Chapter three, which deals with neoconservative thought on the political order, is chiefly concerned with Novak's and Simon's notions of the common good. Novak claims to have created a new concept of the common good, which Rourke believes clashes, not only with Simon's teaching, but with Aristotle's and St. Thomas' as well. Novak posits a radical separation between what he calls the formal common good and the material common good. The former is always the same and,

Applies to the good of the social whole and the promotion of the dignity of every individual. It drives human societies

toward an ever greater realization of their moral capacities while encouraging as well the fullest possible development of personal goods. (pp. 140-41)

Yet because this formal common good is always the same and can never be realized, it is in reality an unknown and empty concept, akin perhaps to one of Kant's noumena. Everyone can will this formal common good precisely because no one can ever know it. Then there is the material common good, which is the actual bringing about of good in the world. Novak insists that this too is unknowable because it involves too many contingents. Each person must be left to seek his own version of the common good, or rather, his own private good.

Rourke and Simon agree with Novak that individual citizens need not personally intend the material common good in their private actions—in undertaking some economic activity, I can primarily focus on the benefit I myself hope to gain. But they part company with him in recognizing as necessary the role of political authority in coordinating the varied actions of society toward the common good. So, although I might embark on some project designed to enhance my own private economic good, I must be prepared to yield to political authority in its necessary function of limiting or guiding private acts for the sake of the common good. The relationship between freedom and authority was a major theme of Simon's work, and Rourke draws heavily on his notion of the necessity of some coordinating authority to direct freedom toward a true common good.

Since Novak has waxed eloquent over what he sees as the community of persons created by capitalist contractual relationships, I must mention Rourke's (and Simon's) notion of the pseudo-common good. This is the supposed common good in the relationship between, say, a craftsman and a moneylender. "For example, in a partnership between a moneylender and a producer of handicrafts, the moneylender provides the financing and the producer of crafts does all of the work; no effect is brought about by the partnership itself." (p. 93) Therefore, there is no proper *common* good in this relationship, only two distinct private goods. Rourke says further that Novak "makes no dis-

inction between partnership and community, [while for] Simon, the common good of a society must be more than a series of partnerships." (p. 121) A true community is characterized by at least some commonality of purpose. In relationships brought about by contract, however, the actors can be actually opposed to each other, as when one is seeking to buy cheap and the other to sell dear. If the sale in fact takes place, because an agreement on price has been reached, it does not mean that a real community has been created; each party still sees his own interest as essentially opposed to the other's.

Despite the fact that Novak, Neuhaus, and Weigel are known as *neoconservatives*, their outlook is actually a kind of *liberalism*. They are heirs of the tradition that arose in the 17th and 18th centuries in opposition to the Christian political and economic order of the Middle Ages. Rourke shows how the neoconservative notion of the state and of politics is not rooted in an orientation toward the good because it accepts "the liberal bias that the central threat to freedom lies with authority and publicly defined visions of the good life." (p. 125) In other words, it accepts that the state must be agnostic toward the good and, thus, toward God.

In chapter four, Rourke takes up the neoconservatives' economic teachings and sums up the basic problem with their economic system,

The activities of the market economy are one area where the pursuit of particular goods frequently conflicts with the common good. Although Simon is by no means opposed in principle to the market economy, he identifies areas where the pursuit of profit regularly and systematically conflicts with the common good. As economies become more and more modernized, the direct association between production and use is increasingly obscured by the tendency of production for use to be replaced by production for exchange. (p. 185)

The issues Rourke raises in chapter four are at the heart of the moral issues that concern capitalism. It seems obvious that the greed and blindness of individual economic actors has often

worked against both justice and even economic prosperity. Only if one holds steadfastly to the liberal dogma of Adam Smith's invisible hand can one believe (often against all evidence) that, somehow, out of the pursuit of individual private gain, the public and general good *always* arises. Similarly, since the purpose of economic activity is to provide the goods needed by mankind, production solely or mostly for the sake of gain results in the production of many useless or harmful products because the primary aim is now to make things that are sellable, whether or not they are truly useful. Instead of considering themselves as providing their fellow men with the material goods they need, businessmen simply aim at achieving profit, by any legal means, regardless of the social benefit or harm involved. In connection with this point, Rourke notes Simon's contention that "the proper end of the production of wealth is always the human person, not wealth itself." (p. 164) Useless or harmful goods are excluded from any proper system of production, for they obviously do not serve any human good.

Because of the injustices and harms that a free market produces, Simon, along with John Paul II and the entire tradition of Catholic social thought, is aware of the necessary role of political authority in limiting and correcting the defects of the market. It is here that occurs one of the clearest contrasts with the proposals of the neoconservatives. "They want a liberal economy at a global level and are therefore concerned to negate any argument that would give political authority an essential role in economic activity." (p. 176) One of the reasons the neoconservatives' ideas are convincing to many is that they identify any criticism of market capitalism with an essentially socialist paradigm. Rourke notes, for example, that Novak has linked traditional Catholic concepts of the common good with socialism. The truth is exactly the opposite. To the extent that socialists were right in some of their claims, as Pius XI explicitly noted in *Quadragesimo Anno*, it was because they were making some of the same indictments of capitalist society as were Catholic social thinkers. The latter, however, were doing so more consistently and from a superior theoretical standpoint. Thinkers as diverse as Hilaire Belloc, G.K. Chesterton, and Christopher Dawson saw

problems with the market and with capitalist economics. To suppose that only socialists think this way is absurd.

Rourke devotes some attention to the situation in Latin America with the recent promotion there of capitalism as the solution to their economic woes. He notes the increase in poverty and the manner in which land, which was formerly used for food production for the poor, is now, with global capitalism, turned to the production of export cash produce. Naturally, few of the profits from the sale of these exports end up in the hands of poor farmers or farm workers. Indeed, in a study released in April 1998, the Inter-American Development Bank reported that both the percentage and number of Latin Americans living in poverty had increased from 25% (44 million) in 1975 to 39% (115 million). This is global capitalism in action!

We should not suppose, however, that Simon (or Rourke) is blind to defects and sin on the part of the state authorities. Rourke quotes Simon that "there remains in the state, no matter how democratic, an appetite for absorption that has to be checked from the outside, if society is to survive." (p. 162) The genuine Catholic tradition has always been aware of possible abuses of power on the part of both governments and private forces. The neoconservatives, however, while setting up bulwarks against state power, seem unaware or unconcerned with the concentration of economic power in private hands, which could do just as much damage to the common good of nations and the world.

In the last major chapter, chapter five, Rourke deals with what is called the moral cultural system—society's moral traditions and cultural forms—which the neoconservatives see as a third independent force in society, in addition to the political and economic systems.

Along with both Rourke and Simon, the neoconservatives Novak, Neuhaus, and Weigel are strong critics of the decadent culture of the late 20th century. But, Rourke points out, while the neoconservatives "join in the backlash in favor of traditional family values [they] seem to see no connection between the economic system that they defend and the cultural changes that they deplore." (p. 234) They either fail to understand or to really care

that capitalism is one of the most potent forces dissolving traditional ways of life in the world today. Tragically, this is especially the case with many traditionally Catholic cultures. In his observations on Novak's views here, Rourke draws on Christopher Dawson's seminal distinctions between Catholic culture and what Dawson called "bourgeois culture," characterized by a pervasive commercial spirit and an historic anti-Catholicism. Rourke writes,

While Novak notes with glee the political victories of the bourgeoisie on a global scale, Dawson's reflections should give the Catholic mind serious reasons to pause. Although the bourgeois class may no longer feel the need to destroy the Church in the political sense, it must always be remembered that the roots of the bourgeois culture lie in cultures that held Catholicism in contempt. (p. 233)

Rourke further states, "Everywhere one goes, there is the music of Michael Jackson, MTV, Madonna videos, and movies and television programs from the United States." (p. 233) Those who work incessantly for economic globalization are, in reality, working for secularization and the spread of the culture of death to the entire world.

What, then, are the neoconservatives up to?

It is clear that the neoconservatives are, among other things, apologists for the business class. . . . They have repackaged classical liberalism with the particular intent of winning more or less traditional Catholics to the cause. (p. 234)

As Catholics, the neoconservatives are, in fact, as much dissenters as Hans Kung or Charles Curran.

Novak, Neuhaus, and Weigel have dissented from the Church's social teaching in the past, making it clear that they have no intention of echoing the Church's reservations about capitalism. Their more recent approach has been to move away from clear and straightforward dissent and to speak in strong tones in favor of Pope John Paul II's most recent encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*. . . . They treat *Centesimus* in

isolation from much of the preceding tradition, despite the clear statements in the text itself to the contrary. Second, criticisms of existing capitalism in previous encyclicals, even by the same Pope, are systematically ignored; previous encyclicals are understood to be overturned, much as a Supreme Court decision. . . . (pp. 236-37)

The neoconservatives do not provide us with a safe guide for applying Catholic teaching to the world situation as we approach the new millennium. Instead of more apologists for the Americanization of the world, we need thinkers who are truly Catholic. Rourke has done a good job of contrasting the neoconservatives with Catholic tradition and papal teaching. I recommend the book to anyone who seeks or needs a detailed examination of the neoconservative program together with an introduction to the Catholic tradition of socio-economic thought.

—*Thomas Storck*