

City of Man, City of God

by James Hitchcock

"Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God."

—Psalms LXXXVII

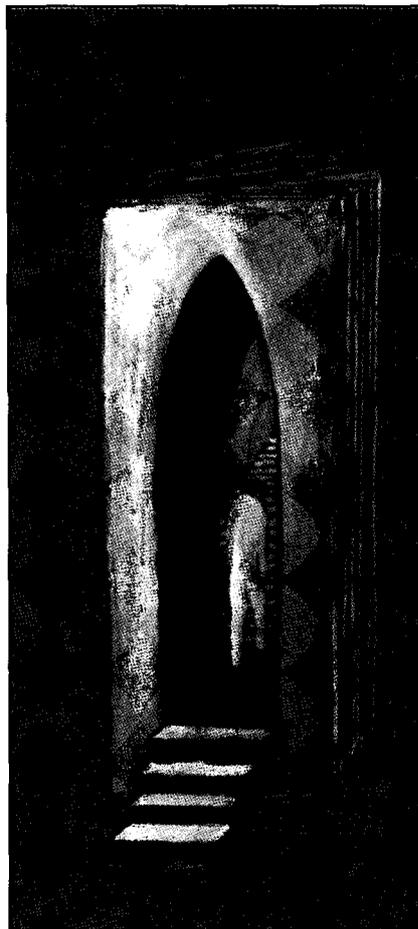
**Heart of the World, Heart
of the Church**

by David L. Schindler
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans;
340 pp., \$37.50

This rich and complex book is on one level the summing up of a controversy over a properly Christian, specifically Catholic, view of politics which has pitted the author, a theologian, against certain "neoconservative" thinkers, notably Richard Neuhaus, Michael Novak, and George Weigel. Beyond them, Schindler takes issue with the late Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray, whose specialty was church-state relations and who is credited with the only original American contribution to the Second Vatican Council—the decree on religious liberty.

Murray is hailed, both in secular and religious circles, for refuting once and for all the idea of the union of church and state, at one time held by almost all religions and abandoned especially late by some Catholics. Murray claimed that the "neutrality" of the American political system makes possible an uninhibited Christian embrace of modern democracy, since neutrality proves to offer the most favorable climate for the development of religion. Schindler, however, considers this neutrality a "con job," arguing that it embodies a secular ideology. Believers are invited to participate in the system without realizing that they are being required to prescind from their faith, to become "a-theists." Hence, in Schindler's view, Catholic neoconserva-

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tives are unduly optimistic about the exceptional character of American, as opposed to European, democracy.

While his thesis may be true, it requires a good deal more historical exploration than Schindler offers. Presumably he agrees with those who think the United States was from its inception the child of the antireligious Enlightenment, but here that is merely assumed. Oddly, given his purposes, Schindler does not examine the nation's founding documents and their subsequent interpretation, in spite of the national debate proceeding

in—among other places—the halls of the Supreme Court. The real problem with the First Amendment is not its implicit ideology but its cryptic character. No one knows what "respecting an establishment of religion" means, so the debate continues.

As a philosopher Schindler appears to believe that he who says A must say B, whereas a historian would reply that he who says A can then say just about anything he pleases—not because the historian rejects the authority of logic but because he realizes that very few people are logical. Thus, whatever may have been the intention of the Founding Fathers, the present civil-libertarian understanding of the Religion Clause was not simply determined from the beginning. All such things tend finally to be shaped by a series of historical contingencies, which means that at many points in history another road might have been taken. For example, Joseph Story, one of the greatest justices of the Supreme Court and an authoritative commentator on the Constitution, held that the common law incorporated Christianity. The modern understanding of the Religion Clause is traceable to the appointment of certain justices to the Supreme Court by President Franklin Roosevelt, although it is unlikely that Roosevelt desired, intended, or even foresaw the effect those appointments would eventually have on religion. Thus, in a sense, the present jurisprudence of the First Amendment is due to the Great Depression and the New Deal to which it gave rise. So, also, the Republican promise to mount a counterrevolution was thwarted by a series of political contingencies. Schindler addresses this subject in a footnote, citing the opinion of another theologian that in the long run the contradictions inherent in false interpretations will reveal themselves. But history shows oth-

erwise, Christianity itself being the prime example: all Christians claim fidelity to the teachings of Christ, yet their differences, ecumenism notwithstanding, only deepen with time.

In arguing against Murray's optimism, Schindler insists that he does not advocate the union of church and state—an error he sees as the right-wing equivalent of liberation theology—while he hints at the alternative solution by suggesting that Christians should maintain a clear distinction between state and society. Presumably he means that Christians should work to transform the culture itself, but he gives little indication of how they might go about it. Indeed, in his book Schindler slights culture and society in favor of politics. In a sense the American experience has been a double one: if the Founding Fathers really were secularists, there has also existed from the beginning a powerful strain of evangelical Christianity which has affected the culture more deeply than has the spirit of the Enlightenment. The character of American public life cannot be defined solely by its constitutional documents.

Schindler alludes to this fact in questioning the claim by neoconservatives that America, compared with other advanced nations, is deeply religious, pointing out how in so many ways this professed faith is at odds with behavior. To Schindler the situation demonstrates the hollowness of the claim that the United States is somehow exceptional in the modern West, and he cites Will Herberg to explain this secularity as an unintended product of Calvinism. A more obvious explanation, however, is simply sin. There are indeed gulfs between what Americans profess and how they act, but probably no more so than among the knights and merchants, craftsmen and peasants, monks and ministers of past societies.

Once again: the roots of American problems are more social and cultural than political. The practical secularism which Schindler correctly identifies as part of the prevailing American spirit owes much more to the phenomenon called the 60's than it does to the First Amendment. The radical reinterpretation of the Constitution was made possible to a large extent by the cultural revolution. As no less a personage than the professional anti-Catholic Paul Blanshard once admitted, the real issue for him was sex and not, as he claimed, the

alleged dangers of union of church and state. While Schindler rightly points to the weaknesses of American religiosity, it is true nonetheless that personal religious belief and public religious testimony—religion's ability to effect both individual conversions and group action—appear stronger in the United States than in any other advanced industrial nation.

Schindler questions Novak's defense of capitalism on the ground that, in calling attention to the social benefits produced by economic self-interest, Novak obscures the obligations Christians are under to transcend self-interest for the sake of love. He revises Adam Smith's famous example of the baker by saying that a Christian baker, while not indifferent to profit, would make the best bread possible under any circumstance, consciously seeking the good of his customers. No doubt there are capitalists who live up to this ideal, but Schindler is correct in saying that the inherent dynamic of capitalism does not require that they do so, thereby prodding the Christian to set his religion aside in order to participate fully in the life of the society. One of the most useful parts of the book is its careful analysis of John Paul II's view of liberalism and capitalism, Schindler arguing persuasively that the neoconservatives' position is not as close to the Pope's as they claim. Yet Schindler's quarrel with the neoconservatives is in one sense premature. The leaders of American Catholicism, including most of its bishops, are not neoconservatives but liberals. If this leadership were to adopt the ideas of Neuhaus, Novak, and Weigel, it would be pulled sharply to the "right" in ways Schindler would presumably find agreeable. Were this to happen—which is unlikely—the debate could finally begin.

Responding to Father Theodore Hesburgh of the University of Notre Dame (surely an unreconstructed liberal, not a neoconservative), Schindler argues that the liberal idea of the university is incompatible with a genuinely Christian outlook, and that the prescriptions for a Catholic university offered by Hesburgh and others are far from being radical enough. He urges that Christians transcend the "objective" approach to knowledge supposedly honored in modern universities and accept the full implications of a love for truth. But here again the American political tradition has

little to do with the present state of academia, which long ago chose to model itself on the methodologically secular German academic system. Until the late 19th century, distinctively American institutions of higher education were pervasively religious.

Schindler's most valuable, and also most difficult, work in this book is his attempt to establish a proper theological foundation for the Christian approach to the world. Drawing especially on the work of two deceased European theologians, Henri De Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar, he nevertheless makes his own original contribution to the subject. De Lubac argued against a kind of Thomism which so sharply separated reason and faith that it is possible to think of human beings in their natural state as being "a-religious" (except insofar as reason leads to God) with a sense of the "supernatural" subsequently added to their makeup. For De Lubac and others in the Augustinian tradition, the desire for and movement toward God is part of man's natural state. Schindler argues that Murray's "a-theistic" approach to politics fails to take account of this religious reality, asking the believer, as it were, to bracket his faith.

A related issue is the meaning of freedom. The American system guarantees "freedom from" (oppression, discrimination, etc.), whereas the properly Christian understanding is "freedom for." It is not possible to understand freedom without knowing how the free person should act; freedom is not an empty vessel merely waiting to be filled. Schindler thinks that contemporary discussions of freedom, including theological discussions, overemphasize its creative aspect, disregarding the extent to which it must first of all be "receptive"—free obedience, as in Mary's "fiat" to the Annunciation. The heart of the matter is the "spousal" relationship between Christ and His Church taught by St. Paul, an understanding which allows for both freedom and obedience, creativity and receptivity.

This book deserves to be a crucial part of every fruitful theological discussion for some time to come. There remains, however, the question whether the approach to public life by corporate religious bodies, as distinct from that by individuals, in fact requires a church-government, even though David Schindler denies that it does.



A Prophet's Reward

by Ralph de Toledano

"Every honest man is a prophet."

—Blake



Auna Mycek-Wodecki

Whittaker Chambers
by Sam Tanenhaus
New York: Random House;
638 pp., \$35.00



What is now known as the Hiss case exploded across the front pages of the nation's newspapers on August 4, 1948. The day before, Whittaker Chambers—a short, stocky man in a rumpled grey suit—had taken the stand before the House Un-American Activities Committee to testify that a number of Americans, some of them highly regarded by the liberal establishment and its media handmaidens, were members of a communist cell in the federal government. To the country at large, the name Whittaker Chambers meant nothing. To the press corps covering the hearing or reading about it, he was known as one of the most brilliant editors in the Time-Life empire—a man who could write with equal eloquence about Marian Anderson, Reinhold Niebuhr, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung,

Ralph de Toledano's Notes from the Underground: The Whittaker Chambers-Ralph de Toledano Letters, 1949-1960 will be published this fall by Regnery.

St. Benedict, or poets like Rilke.

The Chambers testimony would have been buried in HUAC's archive but for two things. Harry Dexter White, who had been an Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and who controlled Henry Morgenthau, the titular head of the department, took the stand to deny all and, having made a stirring speech about Americanism, shuffled off this mortal coil in a great show of martyrdom. Whether he committed suicide or coincidentally lost control of his heart will never be known, for his remains were hastily cremated. What opened up the Hiss case was Alger himself, who shrewdly realized that to remain silent would be considered an admission of guilt and who therefore decided, taking his cue from Mark Twain, that the better part of valor was to lie with *panache*.

That Whittaker Chambers was the accusing angel confused and deceived the press, which had over the years developed a technique for destroying the credibility of witnesses who came forth with accounts of their life in the Communist Party: indignation, innuendo, and malign invention. The more it probed, the more it discovered the real nature of the subject. Asked how he could testify to events of a decade earlier without tripping over his feet, Chambers answered,

"It is simple if you are telling the truth." But his major strength was that he was not defending himself, but defending a philosophy which was unassailable. Ironically, what made Chambers convincing was the shamelessness of the attack on him—an attack which was led by a President of the United States and a former First Lady whose connection with the *apparat* would be documented much later.

The details of the case—the typewriter on which Priscilla Hiss had copied a pyramid of top secret State Department documents for the Soviet secret police, the kitchen middens of the Hisses' private lives, the manner in which they twisted and turned to avoid and evade their acts of complicity—had less effect in contributing to the drama of the case than the Whittaker Chambers whose trousers never knew the dignity of a crease, and the dapper, almost mincing Alger Hiss. For as the case progressed, it became increasingly clear that Chambers was not just another in the long list of witnesses who had given testimony to the treason of Americans in and out of government, but in the religious sense a witness for the civilization and the values under attack by the tacit alliance of Leninists and liberals. (In other guises, that alliance still exists and still feeds its