

Beyond Ratzinger's Republic: *Communio's* Postliberal Turn

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Is the political future of the West a postliberal one? For the past decade, numerous prominent thinkers in America and Europe have been debating this question. Matters that not long ago were merely of historical interest, such as Pope Gelasius I's understanding of the relation between sacral authority and royal power, Thomas Aquinas's thought on monarchy and Robert Bellarmine's theory of the pope's indirect authority in temporal matters are now increasingly studied for their potential answers to contemporary political questions. This development, which would have been nearly unimaginable just a decade earlier, unsurprisingly has been led by Catholics. We say "unsurprisingly" in view of the long pre-modern tradition of Catholic political thought, as well as the Church's long struggle against liberalism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of the current postliberal writers explicitly connect themselves to both of these aspects by using the term "integralist" to describe their position.¹

¹ Edmund Waldstein, O.Cist., a leading promoter of integralism, provides an oft-cited definition of "Integralism in Three Sentences" on the integralist website *The Josias*: "Catholic Integralism is a tradition of thought that, rejecting the liberal separation of politics from concern with the end of human life, holds that political rule must order man to his final goal. Since, however, man has both a temporal and an eternal end, integralism holds that there are two powers that rule him: a temporal power

This “new integralism” represents a radical departure from the mainstream of Catholic political discourse of the last half century, which has largely sought rapprochement with Western liberalism. A group of writers, led by John Courtney Murray, George Weigel, Michael Novak, and Robert George, have held that the American constitutional order is rooted in the natural law tradition, and therefore is basically friendly to Catholic political thought. The Church’s role in American life, they say, is upholding the natural law as a public moral philosophy, while embracing the non-establishment clause of the First Amendment as a matter of principle, in accordance with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. This “Whig Thomism,” which for decades represented the predominant outlook of conservative American Catholics, must now face the challenge of a different sort of Thomism represented by the integralists.²

While the engagement between Whig Thomists and integralists has received most of the attention from scholars and journalists alike, another postliberal option has emerged in recent years. Its source is a group of Catholic thinkers associated with the *Communio* theological movement. Their political vision, which has no single name or label, has a complex and subtle relationship with the thought of earlier *Communio* writers, most of whom shared the Whig Thomist desire for reconciliation with Western liberalism.

and a spiritual power. And since man’s temporal end is subordinated to his eternal end, the temporal power must be subordinated to the spiritual power” (thejosias.com/2016/10/17/integralism-in-three-sentences/). See also Thomas Crean and Alan Fimister, *Integralism: A Manual of Political Philosophy* (Neunkirchen-Seelscheid: Editiones Scholasticae, 2020).

² Representative pieces include John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1960); George Weigel, *Catholicism and the Renewal of American Democracy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Free Press, 1993); Robert George, *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2001). Recent defenses of this outlook include Daniel E. Burns, “Liberal Practice v. Liberal Theory,” *National Affairs* 53 (Fall 2019): 127–41; Robert P. George and Ryan Anderson, “The Baby and the Bathwater,” *National Affairs* 53 (Fall 2019): 172–84; Robert Reilly, *America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2020). For criticism of these recent works by the *Communio* authors we are considering in this article, see D. C. Schindler, *The Politics of the Real: The Church between Liberalism and Integralism* (Steubenville, OH: New Polity, 2021), 294–303; Michael Hanby, “The Birth of Liberal Order and the Death of God: A Reply to Robert Reilly’s *America on Trial*,” *New Polity* 2, no. 1 (2021): 54–85. For an overview of Whig Thomism, see Jesse Russell, “‘Whig Thomism’ and the Making of the Catholic Neoconservative Movement,” *Politics and Religion* 14, no. 2 (2021): 294–315.

The appearance of a *Communio* postliberalism therefore represents a significant development within this intellectual tradition. The most important representative of the earlier *Communio* perspective on political questions is Joseph Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI, who has recently been lauded as the “most important Catholic thinker of the twentieth century” on matters at the intersection of theology and politics.³

In an article titled “Ratzinger’s Republic” that appeared in these pages in 2020, we identified a significant tension in his thought about the Church’s contribution to political life.⁴ Exploring Ratzinger’s writings on natural law, we demonstrated that two currents are present. In accord with his fundamental theological commitments about nature and grace and about faith and reason, Ratzinger often questioned the effectiveness of arguments from natural law. He claimed that, since reason is historically conditioned, and therefore in the current order marked by sin, reason needs grace and faith to function properly. Yet, on other occasions, Ratzinger strongly endorsed arguments from natural law, highlighting its role as the foundation of a just democratic political order. We traced this ambivalence about natural law back to a dilemma at the heart of Ratzinger’s political thought. On the one hand, in accord with his thinking about the relations of nature and grace and faith and reason, Ratzinger argued that the state needs the Church to supply moral values that the state cannot furnish on its own. On the other hand, he believed it belongs to the very nature of the Church to be separate from the state, and he endorsed nonconfessional, religiously pluralistic states.⁵ In light of these two commitments, Ratzinger argued that the contribution Christians are to make to the state is to supply moral values that were discerned under the influence of grace and divine revelation but that must be stripped of their divinely revealed character to yield a rational kernel that can be affirmed by all people, independent of religious faith; in Ratzinger’s thought, the natural law serves the purpose of providing such a confessionally neutral moral apparatus.⁶ We questioned the coherence of the late Pope’s theory. Is his presentation of natural law consistent? Does Ratzinger’s proposal really

³ Russell Hittinger, “How to Inherit a Kingdom: Reflections on the Situation of Catholic Political Thought,” The Institute for Human Ecology’s first annual Lecture on Catholic Political Thought, delivered at the Catholic University of America on October 6, 2022, published in the present issue of *Nova et Vetera* (English) 21, no. 3 (2023): 971–90, with Scott Roniger as co-author.

⁴ Vincent L. Strand, S.J., and Sam Zeno Conedera, S.J., “Ratzinger’s Republic: Pope Benedict XVI on Natural Law and Church and State,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 2 (2020): 669–94.

⁵ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 679–83.

⁶ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 683–85.

respect his commitment to the religious neutrality of the state, given that he thought Christianity alone can provide the moral foundation the state needs? Is his political thinking consonant with his theology of nature and grace and of faith and reason?⁷

Our friend and confrere Fr. Stephen Fields claims to have resolved this dilemma.⁸ The answer, he believes, is found in Benedict's concept of "nature as theologically analogous."⁹ Fields also claims that this concept of nature as analogous can mediate between our position and the interpretation of Benedict offered by Kevin M. Doak, to whom we were replying in "Ratzinger's Republic" in light of Doak's criticism of Strand's 2017 article "On Method, Nature and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*."¹⁰

The present article aims to integrate this series of exchanges about Ratzinger's political thought in the pages of *Nova et Vetera* into the larger postliberal discussion described above. We will proceed in two stages. First, we will show why Fields's attempted resolution of Ratzinger's dilemma does not work. We do not think that Fields has understood our argument about Ratzinger, nor sufficiently demonstrated that the theology of grace he ascribes to Ratzinger really belongs to the late Pope, nor proposed a coherent model of nature and grace. Second, we will show how a group of writers—namely, David L. Schindler, D. C. Schindler, Michael Hanby, and Andrew Willard Jones—have turned Anglophone *Communio* thought in a postliberal direction. In doing so, they have implicitly acknowledged and sought to resolve the dilemma of Ratzinger's political thought, though without mentioning him by name.

"Nature as Analogous"?

Fields frames his article as an attempt to mediate between two "Benedicts," what he calls "Doak's Benedict" and "the Benedict of Strand and Conedera."¹¹ Suggesting that there is a single "Benedict" in our article is puzzling. We

⁷ Strand and Conedera, "Ratzinger's Republic," 685–93.

⁸ Stephen M. Fields, S.J., "Nature as Analogous: A Response to the Doak-Strand/Conedera Symposium on Benedict XVI and the Natural Law," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 19, no. 3 (2021): 769–90.

⁹ Fields, "Nature as Analogous," 770–71, 778–79.

¹⁰ Fields, "Nature as Analogous," 770, 778–79, 783–84; Kevin M. Doak, "Globalism in Natural Law Theory," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 2 (2020): 653–78 (this criticism appears especially on 653–55); Vincent L. Strand, S.J., "On Method, Nature and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 3 (2017): 835–52.

¹¹ Fields also uses "the Strand-Conedera Benedict" ("Nature as Analogous," 775–78, 781, 783–84).

explained in "Ratzinger's Republic" that, within Ratzinger's thought, there are two currents (or as Fields would say, "two Benedicts") concerning the interconnected set of questions about nature and grace, faith and reason, natural law, and Church and state.¹² Doak had presented Benedict as a robust defender of natural law and the capacities of nature and reason. We affirmed this reading and, in fact, amplified it by marshalling a host of texts in which Ratzinger gives a vigorous defense of natural law.¹³ But we also presented many instances where Ratzinger questioned the efficacy of natural law, especially apart from grace and divine revelation.¹⁴ Our article asked if and how these two strands of Ratzinger's thought cohere. Fields's presentation of a single "Strand-Conedera Benedict" seems to miss this. His attempt to adjudicate between "Doak's Benedict" and the "Strand-Conedera Benedict" is, in essence, repeating what we did in "Ratzinger's Republic."

If Fields attempts the same task that we undertook, our respective articles go about this in different ways. We examined numerous texts from Ratzinger spanning his long career. Fields's article, in contrast, involves little exegesis of Ratzinger's writings. To a certain extent, Fields acknowledges this. In the concluding section of his article, he proposes a nature-grace model that "develops Benedict's mediating position" but "does not appeal to Benedict for direct authority."¹⁵ Yet Fields has not demonstrated that what he calls "Benedict's mediating position" is really the thought of Benedict. After Fields offers an exegesis on the Council of Trent's teaching on nature and grace (which includes no references to Benedict), Fields says that he will "explore how Benedict develops the Council in light of the eschatology of John's Gospel" in a section entitled "Benedict's Analogy of Nature."¹⁶ But this development is Fields's and not Benedict's. The section cites Ratzinger four times, but none of these references justify Fields's claim that "Benedict, by situating nature within the Johannine tension between realized and future eschatology, constructs an analogy that, like Trent's, accounts for nature's dynamic plasticity."¹⁷ In short, the model of "nature as analogous" that Fields

¹² Strand and Conedera, "Ratzinger's Republic," 674–79.

¹³ Strand and Conedera, "Ratzinger's Republic," 674–75.

¹⁴ Strand and Conedera, "Ratzinger's Republic," 675–79.

¹⁵ Fields, "Nature as Analogous," 787.

¹⁶ Fields, "Nature as Analogous," 781.

¹⁷ Fields, "Nature as Analogous," 781–84. The four references are Benedict's: (1) noting that *Deus Caritas Est* is a reflection on the pierced side of Christ as the "font of wounded love"; (2) quotation of Theodor Adorno that progress is moving "from the sling to the atom bomb"; (3) judgment that conversion draws human beings together into communion; and (4) claim that love must be the origin and end of the justice at the foundation of the social order. The citations are to Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus*

claims gives coherence to Ratzinger's political thought is not Ratzinger's, but Fields's own conception of nature and grace imposed onto Ratzinger.

Granted that the model is Fields's own construction, does it, nevertheless, speculatively resolve the tensions found in Ratzinger? The distinctive feature of Fields's theology of nature and grace, which he develops at length in his book *Analogies of Transcendence: An Essay on Nature, Grace & Modernity*, is his concept of prevenient grace.¹⁸ Prevenient grace is given at creation and endows nature with its single, supernatural end. It is possessed always and everywhere by all human beings.¹⁹ This understanding of prevenient grace distinguishes Fields's nature–grace model from the respective positions of Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, and neo-Thomist theologies that affirm the concept of pure nature. Fields shares de Lubac's criticisms of the pure-nature theory that distinguishes between a natural end that belongs to human nature qua nature and a supernatural end that is given with grace. In the shared judgment of de Lubac and Fields, this theory wrongly conceives of grace as a foreign, external imposition on nature; moreover, because a being's end determines its species, the human end cannot be altered by grace from a natural to a supernatural end without changing the human species.²⁰ Like de Lubac, Fields affirms a single, supernatural end.²¹ However, appealing to Steven Long's criticism that the Lubacian theory turns nature into an empty receptacle for grace, Fields thinks de Lubac's model risks relegating nature to a totally vitiated entity akin to how the Reformed tradition—as, for example, represented by Karl Barth—views nature.²² Against this tradition, Fields insists that it is imperative to posit a “vitally stout” concept of nature.²³ If Fields has his reservations about de Lubac's position, he is even more

Caritas Est (2005), §§12, 34, 36, 37; Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* (2007), §22; Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 51–52.

¹⁸ Stephen M. Fields, S.J., *Analogies of Transcendence: An Essay on Nature, Grace & Modernity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016).

¹⁹ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 141–142.

²⁰ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 57; Fields, “Nature as Analogous,” 787.

²¹ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 169.

²² Fields, “Nature as Analogous,” 772–73, 776, 786; Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 10–109. For a convincing criticism of Long's claim that the Lubacian model turns nature into a vacuole for grace, see Michael Maria Waldstein, “Balthasar and Other Thomists on Barth's Understanding of Predestination,” in *Thomism and Predestination: Principles and Disputations*, ed. Steven A. Long, Roger W. Nutt, and Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2016), 250–56.

²³ Fields, “Nature as Analogous,” 775.

critical of Rahner's theory of the supernatural existential: Rahner wrongly clings to the belief that man has two ends, one natural and one supernatural, and dissolves the theological significance of nature by defining it as a mere remainder concept (*Restbegriff*).²⁴

To construct his own model of nature and grace, Fields turns to Max Seckler to develop an analogical approach in which the natural instinct of faith is the meeting point between divine and human freedom.²⁵ Fields combines Seckler's theory with Rahner's *Realsymbol* to suggest that nature and grace are analogical (with nature serving as grace's sacramental medium), and that grace itself is analogical.²⁶ Specifically, Fields proposes an analogy between prevenient grace and sanctifying grace in which the former is a disposition for the formal action of the latter.²⁷ Again following Seckler, Fields contends that the natural desire for God and prevenient grace, while formally distinct, are materially the same, and together they constitute sanctifying grace's material cause.²⁸ This leads to Fields's decisive move: human nature receives its supernatural end not from the endowments of nature itself (as de Lubac claims), nor from the gift of sanctifying grace (as neo-Thomists claim), but from prevenient grace, which is universally given to human nature, both in the sense that *all* human beings receive prevenient grace and in the sense that all human beings possess prevenient grace *at all times*—what Fields describes as “the ubiquity of prevenient grace.”²⁹ Prevenient grace endows human nature from the moment of creation with its one and only end, which is a supernatural end. This gift orders human beings proximately to justification through baptism (whether by water or desire) and ultimately to the beatific vision.³⁰

²⁴ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 169, 71–72.

²⁵ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 110–14. Fields relies on Edward Schillebeeckx's presentation of Max Seckler's *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* found in Schillebeeckx's *Revelation and Theology*, trans. N. D. Smith, 2 vols. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967–68), 2:30–75.

²⁶ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 114–23.

²⁷ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 119–21.

²⁸ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 121–22; Fields, “Nature as Analogous,” 789.

²⁹ Fields criticizes Rahner's supernatural existential, yet the theories of the two Jesuits share a deep commonality. Both believe that man exists in a permanently graced condition, even if he is in a state of mortal sin. See: Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 141–42; Fields, “Nature as Analogous,” 789; Karl Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” in *Theological Investigations 4: More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 181. For Rahner's mature treatment of the supernatural existential, see his *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 126–33.

³⁰ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 126–28.

Fields's distinctive idea that prevenient grace is universally present in human nature is the key principle of his attempted integration of the two currents of Benedict's thought on natural law. As we have seen, Benedict at times is pessimistic about the efficacy of natural law arguments apart from grace. But in Fields's model, nature never exists apart from grace. Grace is always present, assisting nature to know the natural law and live in accordance with it.³¹ Therefore, these concerns are allayed. At the same time, the grace here under consideration is not limited to the sanctifying grace enjoyed by the just who participate in the sacramental life of the Church. Thus, Fields can affirm the efficacy of natural law arguments beyond the domain where divine revelation is known and affirmed or where sacramental grace is dispensed by the Church.³² In short, Fields's conviction about the ubiquity of grace allows him, as it were, to have it both ways: human beings cannot know and live the natural law without grace, yet we can be optimistic about the capacity to know and live the natural law even among those who do not affirm divine revelation and are separate from the Church and her sacraments, because all men are always and everywhere assisted by God's supernatural gift of grace.

We applaud Fields's attention to the question of how prevenient grace prior to justification bears on the debate over supernatural finality, a point which has been insufficiently considered in the nature–grace disputes.³³ Nevertheless, we do not think that his model posits an intelligible concept of nature, and therefore do not believe it resolves the issues in Ratzinger's political thought. A main aim of Fields's theology is to demonstrate the need for “a robust concept of nature.”³⁴ Yet his model undermines this

³¹ See Fields, “Nature as Analogous,” 789.

³² See Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 136: “God’s salvific purposes operate outside the juridic borders of the institutional church, both as the prevenient grace that gives all human beings an instinct of faith and as the baptism of desire that, in addition to the usual water, can also justify.” Fields’s confidence in the action of grace beyond the Church is seen in his belief that, through “non-Christian forms of human worship,” prevenient grace can mediate sanctifying grace (233). Whether this view is overly optimistic and unduly separates grace from categorical Christianity and the Church is beyond the scope of our current inquiry.

³³ Scholars who defend the theorem of pure nature and hold that a supernatural finality is conferred only with sanctifying grace have tended to overlook the question of how grace (specifically prevenient actual grace) received prior to justification impacts the question about a supernatural end. Fields is correct to highlight the relation between prevenient grace and sanctifying grace, for as Aquinas would remind us, the distinction between prevenient and subsequent grace does not divide grace in its essence, but only in its effects (*Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 111, a. 3, ad 2).

³⁴ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 243.

intention, inasmuch as it suggests that human nature has no end apart from grace. As we have seen, Fields rejects the position shared by Rahner and the neo-Thomists that human nature possesses a natural end that grace elevates into a supernatural end, and de Lubac's position that human nature *qua* nature has a supernatural end. Fields says human nature has only a single, supernatural end that is conferred by prevenient grace. But this leads to the conclusion that human nature *qua* nature has no end at all, neither natural nor supernatural. It is hard to understand what "nature" means in such a schema. A thing with no end is *per se* unintelligible and unknowable, void of meaning or sense.

This ateleological notion of nature undermines the coherence of Fields's accounts of the Church–state relation and of the natural law. Fields defends Murray against the criticisms of David L. Schindler (which we will consider below) and insists that the state should remain neutral toward religions, for the obligation to seek the truth belongs to individuals, not to the state. In an effort to protect what is proper to the state from the overreach of the Church, Fields insists that nature has "its rightful ends" and that "the church suffers when, in a misguided effort to consecrate the profane, it inappropriately encroaches upon nature's distinct purposes."³⁵ However, given Fields's opinion that nature *qua* nature has no end, it is not clear what these "rightful ends" and "distinct purposes" are.

In a similar way, it is not clear how Fields's ateleological concept of nature provides a basis for a sound theory of natural law. In a key passage, Fields writes:

If Benedict emphasizes the natural law as the foundation of the political order, it is not because he inconsistently underplays the bias of sin and the need for grace. It is because, consistent with nature's analogy, he staunchly asserts and defends the natural capacity of human reason and volition *as the very basis of grace* leading to salvation. Without humanity's natural ability to know the true, the good, and the just, and to act upon them, the Catholic doctrine of grace collapses into the Reformed position. Accordingly, metaphysics can ground a universal justice knowable without direct advertence to grace. Equally, metaphysics needs grace's purification. Nature's innate power to know and freely act, its innate power to undermine what it can know and do, and its innate power to be purified coexist.³⁶

³⁵ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 137–38 (see further the surrounding context of 134–40).

³⁶ Fields, "Nature as Analogous," 783.

Fields's belief that nature has no intrinsic finality undermines the very things he claims are necessary for a coherent theory of natural law, namely, nature's innate ability to know and to act freely. If nature has no finality apart from grace, it is nonsensical to speak of these powers, or to suggest that metaphysics can provide a theory of justice apart from grace. At some level, Fields seems to be aware of this. In *Analogies of Transcendence*, he claims that, without grace, human beings can neither know anything nor accomplish any good, even goods of utility such as building a house or planting a vineyard; indeed, he explicitly criticizes Aquinas for holding that human beings in a state of corrupt nature can accomplish such goods.³⁷

It is important to see that this deep pessimism about the capacities of nature qua nature logically follows from Fields's distinctive belief that nature qua nature has no telos. Even if Fields maintains a certain logical consistency by asserting that nature can neither know nor will the good without grace, this comes at the cost of falling into the very Reformed position Fields seeks to avoid. If nature has no intrinsic finality, nature cannot be, as Fields claims, a free center of action with the power to reject grace or to assent to grace and thereby cooperate with it.³⁸ In the end, the central claim of Fields's nature-grace model—namely, that nature qua nature has no end, but receives a single, supernatural end only through prevenient grace—undercuts the very capacities of nature that Fields thinks are necessary for natural law to serve as the basis for the political order. This model, therefore, is unable to offer the speculative resources needed to address the incongruities of Ratzinger's political thought.

The Postliberal Hinge: David L. Schindler

If Fields's account does not resolve the dilemma in Ratzinger's thought on nature-grace and politics, are there alternative solutions? We now turn to the recent contributions of *Communio* thinkers to the postliberal discussion. In a way, their work has resolved Ratzinger's dilemma, but because they have

³⁷ Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, 17–25, 132–33; Aquinas, *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 2, corp.

³⁸ Fields says: "The coexistence of prevenient grace with nature does not prejudice nature's freedom by vitiating its ability either to reject or cooperate with grace, either prevenient or sanctifying, to which prevenient grace is ordered" ("Nature as Analogous," 780). It is not the coexistence of prevenient grace with nature that leads to this vitiation, but the idea that nature has no end. Furthermore, it is hard to understand what nature's "rejection" of prevenient grace means for Fields: at most it means ignoring the promptings of prevenient grace calling the human person to justification; it cannot mean that nature loses prevenient grace, given that prevenient grace is ubiquitous for Fields (789).

not often mentioned him by name, both the dilemma and its resolution have gone largely unnoticed. It is significant for the history of *Communio* thought that their postliberal turn entails the repudiation of Ratzinger's key political ideas. We will trace this development, first in the thought of David L. Schindler and then in a trio of later authors: his son D. C. Schindler, Michael Hanby, and Andrew Willard Jones.

Before we do so, however, an explanation of what we mean by calling these men "*Communio* thinkers" is in order. Hans Urs von Balthasar, de Lubac, and Ratzinger founded the international theological review *Communio* in 1972 after finding themselves out of step with the progressivist direction of the journal *Concilium*.³⁹ While the *Communio* movement has not developed into a strict school (indeed, its proponents tend to be averse to school theology) and its individual authors retain their distinct voices, there is, nonetheless, a detectable *Communio* theological style and substance characterized by the following themes: a radical and thoroughgoing Christocentrism; a Church-as-communion ecclesiology grounded in Trinitarian *communio*; concern about the dangers of "extrinsicism" and "pure nature" in the relationship between nature and grace; an integration of mystical and speculative theology; a stress on the theological significance of Mary for other dogmatic topics (theological anthropology, ecclesiology, etc.); an appreciation for the thought of Aquinas (especially the *analogia entis*) combined with a generally critical stance toward the various iterations of neo-Thomism; a desire to incorporate the insights and positive elements of modern philosophy, literature, and art; sensitivity to the cultural and pastoral questions of the times coupled with a desire to address them from the riches of the Church's sources; and belief in the Church's need for dramatic renewal in the modern era, which includes a basically positive assessment of Vatican

³⁹ For this history and an overview of the hallmarks of *Communio* theology (especially vis-à-vis Thomism, *Concilium* theology, and liberation theology), see Tracey Rowland, *Catholic Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 91–138. For the founders' commentary on *Communio's* establishment and aims, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Communio—a Program," trans. W. J. O'Hara, *Communio* 33, no. 1 (1992): 153–69; Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 109; Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances That Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 150; Joseph Ratzinger, "Communio: A Program," *Communio* 19, no. 3 (1992): 436–49; Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927–1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 144–45; Ratzinger, *Theology of the Liturgy: The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence*, ed. Michael J. Miller, trans. John Saward et al., Joseph Ratzinger Collected Works 11 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), 358–64.

II. The Schindlers and Hanby, through their editorial and authorial involvement in the English-language edition of *Communio* and their professorships at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Washington, DC (itself a center of *Communio* thought), and above all through their intellectual concerns, commitments, and favorite authors, are the intellectual heirs of *Communio*'s founders, even if they part ways from them on certain points. This is less obvious in the case of the historian Jones, but the Christocentrism and nature–grace framework (which broadly can be described as Lubacian) present throughout his works justifies placing him among the *Communio* thinkers.⁴⁰

David L. Schindler was the hinge for the postliberal turn in *Communio* thought. Schindler shared much in common with Ratzinger in terms of theological aims, method, style, and content. At the same time, however, he made a critical contribution to the current postliberal phenomenon, and in so doing, quietly distanced himself from Ratzinger's political thought. In a series of exchanges with Weigel in the late 1980s, as well as in his book *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation*, Schindler advanced the thesis that liberalism, especially as articulated in the American constitutional order, does not establish "articles of peace" in pluralistic societies that enable their members to pursue their own conception of the good life.⁴¹ Instead, he claimed, liberal regimes operate on basically godless assumptions, and they form the souls of their citizens

⁴⁰ Although the political writings of D. C. Schindler, Hanby, and Jones increasingly appear in the journal *New Polity: A Journal of Postliberal Thought*, these pieces continue to be characteristically *Communio*. For Jones's Christocentrism, see Andrew Willard Jones, *The Two Cities: A History of Christian Politics* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2021), xiii–xviii; for his Lubacian nature–grace inclinations, see *Before Church and State: A Study of Social Order in the Sacramental Kingdom of St. Louis IX* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2017), 397–448; *Two Cities*, 296–298, 321. In a podcast on the occasion of Pope Benedict XVI's death, Jones mentions the importance of the *Communio* theologians Ratzinger, de Lubac, and Balthasar in his religious and intellectual formation ("Pope Benedict Special," with Jacob Imam, New Polity podcast, January 20, 2023, newpolity.com/podcasts-hub/b16).

⁴¹ See George Weigel, "Is America Bourgeois?" *Crisis*, no. 1 (October 1986): 5–10; David L. Schindler, "Is America Bourgeois?" *Communio* 14, no. 3 (1987): 262–90; Schindler, "Editorial: On Being Catholic in America," *Communio* 14, no. 3 (1987): 213–14; Weigel, "Is America Bourgeois?: A Response to David Schindler," *Communio* 15, no. 1 (1988): 77–91; Schindler, "Once Again: George Weigel, Catholicism and American Culture," *Communio* 15, no. 1 (1988): 92–121; Schindler, "Response to Mark Lowery," *Communio* 18, no. 3 (1991): 450–72; Weigel, "Response to Mark Lowery," *Communio* 18, no. 3 (1991): 439–49; Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

accordingly. Schindler's main target was the work of Murray, who not only paved the way for the revision of Church teaching on religious liberty, but also, as a conciliar *peritus*, helped draft Vatican II's *Dignitatis Humanae*.⁴² Schindler objected to Murray's interpretation of *Dignitatis Humanae* in terms of a defense of the American constitutional order.⁴³

In his debate with Weigel, Schindler arguably made the first "postliberal" salvo against Whig Thomism, but its time had not yet arrived. In the early 1990s, when Western confidence was running high in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, relatively few Catholic intellectuals or churchmen were receptive to Schindler's dim assessment of liberal theory and practice. Schindler was, moreover, an enthusiast of Pope John Paul II and of his chief ally, Cardinal Ratzinger, whom Schindler saw as carrying forth an interpretation and implementation of Vatican II generally in line with *Communio* thought. The fact that Ratzinger's political thought is organized around key liberal ideas, as we have shown in "Ratzinger's Republic," was simply a nonissue.⁴⁴ Only when Christians in America began experiencing a series of routs on "moral values" issues, especially homosexuality and transgenderism, starting around 2010, did Catholic intellectuals start taking Schindler's antiliberalism more seriously.

If Schindler rejected the Whig Thomist interpretation of *Dignitatis Humanae* represented by Murray and Weigel, what was his alternative, and what significance does it have for *Communio's* postliberal turn? The answer is found in Schindler's long 2015 essay "Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity: An Interpretation of *Dignitatis Humanae* on the Right to Religious Freedom." Here Schindler explains the conciliar declaration in terms of the intrinsic relationship between truth and freedom, rather than according to immunity from coercion as a negative juridical freedom, a view he associated with Whig Thomism.

⁴² Schindler clearly does not agree with the view that Murray took a backseat to Jacques Maritain in the drafting of *Dignitatis Humanae*, as he identifies Murray as the "first scribe" of the crucial third schema that shifted from an ecumenical to a civil-political perspective; see David L. Schindler, "Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity: An Interpretation of *Dignitatis Humanae* on the Right to Religious Freedom," in David L. Schindler and Nicholas J. Healy Jr., *Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity: The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, a New Translation, Redaction History, and Interpretation of Dignitatis Humanae* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 39–209, at 41. For the view that Murray was of lesser importance, see John R. T. Lamont, "Catholic Teaching on Religion and State," *New Blackfriars* 96, no. 1066 (2015): 688–91.

⁴³ Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 60–62.

⁴⁴ Strand and Conedera, "Ratzinger's Republic," 679–83.

Schindler's interpretation of *Dignitatis Humanae* rests explicitly on what he calls a "*communio* ecclesiology," which he credits with integrating the laity into the essential meaning of the Church. In contrast with the typical preconciliar view of the laity as a function or extension of the priestly-institutional dimension of the Church, *communio* ecclesiology understands the holiness of the Church as including the laity as present in the world. "Thus the laity, in their proper reality as lay, are meant to bear 'subjectively' the 'objective' sacramental reality of the Church into the world."⁴⁵ Schindler claims that Vatican II made such an ecclesiology, which he identifies with the thought of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, its own.⁴⁶

Communio ecclesiology has numerous implications for Schindler's political thought. Borrowing from Balthasar, Schindler distinguishes between the "Marian" and "Petrine" dimensions of the Church, saying that the former precedes the latter.⁴⁷ The "Church-lay" (by which Schindler means the Marian and lay dimension of the Church) is meant to remain present in the world, seeking to open from within all temporal structures and processes of civil society to the eternal reality as revealed in Christ. These include, he notes, the state structures that are a distinct but integral expression of civil society. The Church-lay, furthermore, rightly seeks favored status for the "Church-Peter" (the clerical hierarchy) that may include privileged recognition in the constitutional order, so that it may remain distinct as a transcendent, objective-sacramental reference for society and the state.⁴⁸ According to Schindler, the Church-lay and the Church-Peter are both intrinsically responsible for the temporal order and the eternal order, but each retains a distinct priority. In regard to direct and proper responsibility for eternal order qua eternal, the Church-lay is subordinate to the Church-Peter; in regard to direct and proper responsibility for temporal order qua temporal, the Church-Peter remains subordinate to the Church-lay. He adds that the Church exercises political power only in the form of initiatives of the Church-lay operating from within temporal structures and processes.⁴⁹

Though this account obviously relies upon concepts and writings from earlier *Communio* authors, it also revises them in significant ways. Three examples may serve to demonstrate the point. The first concerns Schindler

⁴⁵ Schindler, "Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity," 137.

⁴⁶ Schindler, "Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity," 136–37.

⁴⁷ A representative piece from Balthasar is the essay "The Marian Principle," in *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 101–13.

⁴⁸ Schindler, "Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity," 138.

⁴⁹ Schindler, "Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity," 140.

himself. "Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity" endorses the political establishment of Christianity in a way that is not obvious in his earlier writings. In an excursus on the topic, Schindler advocates in the political sphere "a privileging of the *authority* of the Church as the *sacrament* of man's ultimate end and meaning," and claims that the laity's "effort to order all temporal reality in light of the ultimate end of human existence as revealed in Jesus Christ" includes "not only *societal* structures, but the structures of the *state and its law* as well."⁵⁰ In *Heart of the World*, he seemed to have eschewed the establishment of any juridical relationship between Church and state while repeating the warnings of de Lubac and Balthasar against integralism.⁵¹ The deep criticism of liberalism had not yet been paired with the affirmation of political establishment that Schindler proposed in "Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity."

Second, Schindler reinterpreted for his own purposes the work of de Lubac, specifically an article from the 1930s on political questions.⁵² The main aim of this article had been refuting Bellarmine's theory of indirect temporal power, which despite the protests of its proponents, entails that "the Church has real political authority, a certain temporal jurisdiction." De Lubac regards such a claim as unacceptable.⁵³ He describes theories of this ilk as erroneous and scandalous, going so far as to say that their proponents "are tempting the Church, just as Satan tempted Christ in the desert."⁵⁴ This is because making the civil power a mere instrument of spiritual power "demeans the Church as well as humiliates the State."⁵⁵ In many respects, this article is reminiscent of the work of both Murray and Ratzinger.

De Lubac's article contains, however, an ambiguity that is similar to Ratzinger's dilemma, for the French Jesuit says that "the Church ennobles the

⁵⁰ Schindler, "Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity," 140, 142.

⁵¹ Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 5, 7, 44, 84, 87.

⁵² Henri de Lubac, "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters," in *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 199–233. Sarah Shortall says that de Lubac's proposal in this article contains "an entire revolution in Catholic political theology" (*Soldiers of God in a Secular World: Catholic Theology and Twentieth-Century French Politics* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021], 59).

⁵³ De Lubac, "Authority of the Church," 203.

⁵⁴ De Lubac, "Authority of the Church," 210. Ratzinger offers a similar interpretation of Jesus's temptations in the desert; see Joseph Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 1, *From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 39–43.

⁵⁵ De Lubac, "Authority of the Church," 210.

State, inspiring it to be a Christian State . . . and, thus a more human one.”⁵⁶ He endorses the idea of Christian influence in all dimensions of human life, including politics, and calls for “the foundation of a new society, one that is both more human and more Christian.”⁵⁷ De Lubac connects the relationship between Church and state to the relationship between nature and grace, saying that “grace seizes nature from the inside and, far from lowering it, lifts it up to have it serve its ends. It is from the interior that faith transforms reason, that the Church influences the State.”⁵⁸ He argues that the Church’s interventions in this regard are entirely spiritual and work only by acting on consciences.⁵⁹ This foregrounding of conscience is similar to Ratzinger, but neither of them offers much further explanation about how grace’s transformation of the state from within actually works.⁶⁰

According to Schindler, de Lubac both anticipated and is illuminated by Vatican II’s ecclesiology and Christology. Schindler explains that, while the Church-Peter is denied proper jurisdiction over temporal affairs, it still exercises authority over the Christian consciences of the Church-lay, as de Lubac clearly states in his article.⁶¹ It is far from clear, however, that de Lubac understood these relationships in Schindler’s terms: a Christian laity exercising its proper jurisdiction by opening all temporal structures and processes of civil society, including state structures, to the eternal reality as revealed in Christ, while also seeking favored status for the clergy in the constitutional order. In fact, de Lubac’s preferred example for the clergy’s legitimate exercise of authority over the consciences of the Christian laity is Pope Leo XIII’s *ralliement*, whereby the Pope in the 1890s commanded French Catholics to abandon the monarchist cause and their “systematic and illegal opposition” to the Third Republic, a notoriously anticlerical regime.⁶² Whereas the French Jesuit in the 1930s had appeared to be making an argument *against* cooperative juridical relationships between Church and state, Schindler reinterpreted de Lubac’s ideas to argue *for* such relationships.

A third example of Schindler’s revision of *Communio* thought is found in his reading of Ratzinger. Schindler enlisted Ratzinger in support of his

⁵⁶ De Lubac, “Authority of the Church,” 212.

⁵⁷ De Lubac, “Authority of the Church,” 211, 220, 230; de Lubac, “Internal Causes of the Weakening and Disappearance of the Sense of the Sacred,” in *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 238–239; de Lubac, “Christian Explanation of Our Times,” in *Theology in History*, 443.

⁵⁸ De Lubac, “Authority of the Church,” 212.

⁵⁹ De Lubac, “Authority of the Church,” 230–31.

⁶⁰ For our criticism of Ratzinger on this point, see “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 692.

⁶¹ Schindler, “Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity,” 142.

⁶² De Lubac, “Authority of the Church,” 231–32.

interpretation of *Dignitatis Humanae*, without acknowledging their obvious disagreements.⁶³ In his 2005 Christmas address to the Roman Curia, Pope Benedict famously proposed a “hermeneutic of reform, of renewal in the continuity of the one-subject church” for interpreting Vatican II and specifically addressed the issue of religious liberty.⁶⁴ Schindler opposed the interpretation of this address offered by Martin Rhonheimer, who claims that religious liberty, even as a civil right, can be neutral with respect to metaphysical-religious claims.⁶⁵ Schindler, by contrast, saw Ratzinger as understanding religious liberty in light of the connection between freedom and truth and as an expression of fidelity to the Church’s deep tradition.⁶⁶ He agreed with the late Pope’s claim that the martyrs of the Church died not only for Christ, but also for freedom of conscience, precisely because the God they worshiped transcended the state. According to Schindler, Benedict’s remarks in the Christmas address thus primarily concern the nature of the Christian faith and its transcendent order of truth rather than the nature of the state.⁶⁷ In *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Church is concerned above all with being faithful to her own identity as Church. As Schindler puts it, “making an essential element of modern thought her own, in a word, means *affirming* that element *all the while reconfiguring it where necessary in light of her own tradition*.”⁶⁸

While there are good grounds for seeing in the 2005 address a concern for the relationship between freedom and truth, Schindler ignored a key idea found in this same source: following World War II, Pope Benedict said, “Catholic statesmen demonstrated that a modern secular state could exist that was not neutral regarding values but alive, drawing from the great ethical sources opened by Christianity,” and that such a state “would make room impartially for citizens of various religions and ideologies, merely assuming responsibility for an orderly and tolerant coexistence among them and for

⁶³ Schindler and Healy Jr. dedicate *Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity* to Joseph Ratzinger / Benedict XVI. Schindler’s enlistment of Ratzinger is also on display in David L. Schindler, “America’s Technological Ontology and the Gift of the Given: Benedict XVI on the Cultural Significance of the *Quaerere Deum*,” *Communio* 38, no. 2 (2011): 237–78.

⁶⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, “Interpreting Vatican II,” *Origins CNS Documentary Service* 35, no. 32 (January 26, 2006): 536.

⁶⁵ See Martin Rhonheimer, *The Common Good of Constitutional Democracy: Essays in Political Philosophy and on Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. William F. Murphy Jr. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013).

⁶⁶ Schindler, “Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity,” 106–9.

⁶⁷ Schindler, “Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity,” 110–11.

⁶⁸ Schindler, “Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity,” 111.

the freedom to practice their own religion.”⁶⁹ This is the very notion of the liberal state that Schindler spent decades opposing. He likewise ignored another consistent feature of Ratzinger’s political thought, which is the insistence that, as a result of Christianity’s desacralization of the state, historical Christendom does not provide a legitimate template for Church–state relations. Put simply, Ratzinger applied “*communio* ecclesiology” to political questions in a rather different way from Schindler’s.

David L. Schindler was the key figure for the postliberal turn of *Communio* thought, especially because he tried to bring along his predecessors with him. This required him to make a selective reading of Ratzinger, which was possible precisely because of the basic unresolved dilemma in the latter’s thought. Schindler took the side that fit with his own theory without acknowledging the disagreement with the other, liberal side. As we have argued from the beginning, this is the basic problem with scholarship on Ratzinger. Rhonheimer, Doak, and Fields have also done partial readings of him, except that they take the liberal side. One must be attentive to both sides to avoid this mistake.⁷⁰

Full Turn: D. C. Schindler, Michael Hanby, and Andrew Willard Jones

If David L. Schindler’s postliberal turn distanced him from Ratzinger, a subsequent generation of *Communio* thinkers is even more critical of the late Pope’s political ideas, even if they do not mention him by name. D. C. Schindler, Michael Hanby, and Andrew Willard Jones share key theological principles with Ratzinger but obtain very different results when applying

⁶⁹ Benedict XVI, “Interpreting Vatican II,” 537, 538.

⁷⁰ A similar problem affects Daniel E. Burns’s study of Ratzinger’s thought. Although he insightfully explores the connections between Augustine, paleo-Platonists, and Ratzinger on political questions, Burns overlooks Ratzinger’s indebtedness to the Enlightenment and liberalism. His views on religious liberty may not square with those of John Rawls, but Ratzinger surely reads Augustine through the prism of twentieth-century anxiety about confessional regimes. See: Daniel E. Burns, “Ratzinger on the Augustinian Understanding of Religious Freedom,” *Communio* 44 (Summer 2017), 296–322; Daniel E. Burns, “Augustine and Platonic Political Philosophy: The Contribution of Joseph Ratzinger,” in *Augustine’s Political Thought*, ed. Richard Dougherty (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2019), 245–72. By contrast, Russell Hittinger highlights Ratzinger’s esteem for the Enlightenment’s defense of human reason and the need for natural law dialogue to reconnect with it; see F. Russell Hittinger, “Natural Law and Public Discourse: The Legacies of Joseph Ratzinger,” *Loyola Law Review* 60, no. 2 (2014): 241–71.

them to political questions. These three authors marshal evidence and arguments from history, philosophy, and theology to make a distinctive contribution to the American postliberal discussion. Schindler and Jones have each written multiple books and articles laying out their case, whereas Hanby has a series of articles.⁷¹ Perhaps the most striking feature of these works—which also makes for the greatest contrast with Ratzinger—is the deep and relentless rejection of liberalism in all its forms and manifestations. All three men are convinced of the perverse and even diabolical character of liberal ideology and regimes, and of the understanding of religious freedom and separation of Church and state that liberalism promotes. Schindler and Hanby point to seismic shifts in the understanding of God, metaphysics, nature, and teleology that took place in the early modern period, with particular attention to the thought of John Locke, whom they regard as a key theorist of American liberalism.⁷² Jones provides a groundbreaking study of

⁷¹ The most relevant include: Schindler, *Politics of the Real*; D. C. Schindler, *Freedom from Reality: The Diabolical Character of Modern Liberty* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017); Schindler, "Sources of Authority: The Roots of the Great American Identity Crisis," *New Polity* 3, no. 2 (2022): 17–23; Schindler, "Integralism as Fragmentation: A Response to Pater Edmund Waldstein," *New Polity* 2, no. 2 (2021): 21–32; Schindler, "Catholic Politics and the Analogy of Authority," *Communio* 48, no. 4 (2021): 799–824; Schindler, "Challenging the Terms of Liberalism: On *The Politics of Virtue*," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 16, no. 4 (2018): 1353–69; Schindler, "Liberalism, Religious Freedom, and the Common Good: The Totalitarian Logic of Self-Limitation," *Communio* 40, no. 2 (2013): 577–615; Jones, *Two Cities*; Jones, *Before Church and State*; Andrew Willard Jones, "The Weakness of Caesar and the Power of the Cross: How Martyrdom Defeats Tyrants," *New Polity* 3, no. 1 (2022): 53–66; Jones, "The Priority of Peace and the Problem of Power," *Communio* 48, no. 2 (2021): 307–54; Jones, "A Liturgical Cosmos: The Sense of Scripture and the Meaning of Politics in the World of Pope Innocent III," *New Polity* 1, no. 2 (2020): 31–49; Jones, "The End of Sovereignty: An Essay in Christian Postliberalism," *New Polity* 1, no. 1 (2020): 25–48; Michael Hanby, "Are We Postliberal Yet?," *New Polity* 3, no. 3 (2022): 11–27; Hanby, "American Revolution as Total Revolution: Del Noce and the American Experiment," *Communio* 48, no. 3 (2021): 450–86; Hanby, "Birth of Liberal Order"; Hanby, "What Comes Next," *New Polity* 1, no. 3 (2020): 77–87; Hanby, "For and Against Integralism," *First Things*, no. 301 (March 2020): 43–50; Hanby, "Our Post-Political Future," *The Lamp*, no. 2 (Assumption 2020): 25–30; Hanby, "Before and After Politics: The Technocratic Fate of Liberal Order," *The Political Science Reviewer* 43, no. 2 (2020): 511–30; Hanby, "The Civic Project of American Christianity," *First Things*, no. 250 (2015): 33.

⁷² Both thinkers place Locke within the intellectual shifts of the period, rather than treating him as their source (Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 13–127; Hanby, "Birth of Liberal Order," 65–73).

the Middle Ages and contrasts the sociopolitical models of that period with the liberal ones that emerged in subsequent centuries.

Schindler portrays modern thinkers' understanding of freedom, political order, and the role of religion as "diabolical" in the etymological sense of "to divide" or "to set apart or at odds."⁷³ Freedom is separated from truth and goodness, people are separated from each other, social life is separated from tradition properly understood, and so forth. His exploration of contemporary American social life aims to show that liberalism's flight from reality is even more catastrophic, because more insidious, than the rejection of Christianity found in the continental revolutionary tradition.⁷⁴ Liberalism, he claims, is an undoing of the synthesis of Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome that Catholic Christianity represents. This undoing means that the constitutive elements of the synthesis, even if they are carried forward in the Western tradition, lose their proper relationship to each other and manifest themselves as social pathologies.⁷⁵

In a magisterial essay in reply to Robert Reilly's defense of the American founding, Hanby seeks to demonstrate that the key political thinkers behind this event took for granted the mechanization of nature and reason that had already begun in the seventeenth century. This development amounted not so much to a rejection of the Christian tradition, but to "a radical *transformation of that tradition* at every level—theological, metaphysical, natural, scientific, ecclesiastical, cultural and sociological—a transformation that cannot be papered over by appeal to similar sounding texts separated by centuries."⁷⁶ Although there are differences between the respective methods of Schindler and Hanby, their arguments and conclusions against liberalism go hand in hand.⁷⁷

In his study of the reign of Louis IX, Jones portrays a world "before Church and State," that is, before liberalism had fashioned these categories as they are understood now. Although his idea that spiritual and temporal authorities were deeply intertwined in the Middle Ages is not novel, Jones breaks new ground in arguing that medieval political thought and practice did not entail a contest over sovereignty. Neither popes nor emperors, much less "Church" and "State," were struggling with each other for absolute dominion over all aspects of social and political life, and the corresponding

⁷³ Schindler identifies six features of a philosophical understanding of the diabolical, which are then explored at length (*Freedom from Reality*, 7, 158–71).

⁷⁴ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 193–275; Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 61.

⁷⁵ We are left, Schindler says, with subjectivist faith, abstract nature, and formalistic, procedural political order (Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 294).

⁷⁶ Hanby, "Birth of Liberal Order," 69.

⁷⁷ It is notable that Schindler dedicates *Politics of the Real* to Hanby.

prerogative to surveil, catalogue, and regulate all human interactions.⁷⁸ Instead, civil and ecclesiastical authorities respected custom and tradition when they intervened in legal disputes, and generally aided those entities, such as the family, guilds, and confraternities, that are called "pre-political" in contemporary parlance.⁷⁹ In Jones's view, the notion that the medieval powers were engaged in a struggle over sovereignty owes to the triumph of Hobbesian ideas, especially primordial violence.⁸⁰

All three authors see their postliberal political visions in terms of a concrete application of their principles of nature and grace.⁸¹ Like their predecessors de Lubac and Ratzinger, they are concerned about the problem of "extrinsicism" in neo-Scholastic thought and portray nature and grace as overlapping spheres that have different formal objects. Although Schindler takes a partially sympathetic approach to the integralist thought of Edmund Waldstein, he says that ultimately Waldstein understands nature and grace in extrinsicist terms, and therefore conceives of the political order as the coercion of the state by the Church.⁸² In the process, Schindler seeks to vindicate Balthasar's warnings against integralism, as well as his father's characterization of the nature-grace and Church-state relationships.⁸³ Hanby faults the traditionalist right for subordinating temporal to spiritual goods by imposing them from above and from without in an extrinsicist manner.⁸⁴ The penultimate chapter of Jones's *Before Church and State* seeks to integrate the political thought of Augustine and Aquinas in such a way that the relationship between nature, sin, and grace is correlated with the ordering of society in the age of Louis IX.⁸⁵ Jones makes related criticisms of the neo-Scholastic understanding of throne-and-altar alliances.⁸⁶ For all three thinkers, the issue is maintaining an intrinsic relation between nature and grace, which was the primary concern of de Lubac, and according to David L. Schindler, is the foundation of Vatican II as interpreted by *Communio* theology.⁸⁷

⁷⁸ Jones, *Before Church and State*, 2–20; Jones, "End of Sovereignty," 415, 424.

⁷⁹ Jones, *Before Church and State*, 177–217.

⁸⁰ Jones, *Before Church and State*, 13.

⁸¹ See Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 260: "What we are ultimately dealing with here is the political instantiation of the classic nature-grace question."

⁸² Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 288.

⁸³ Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 284–86.

⁸⁴ Hanby, "For and Against Integralism," 46.

⁸⁵ Jones, *Before Church and State*, 397–448.

⁸⁶ Jones, *Two Cities*, 296–97.

⁸⁷ David L. Schindler, "Threads Interview with David Schindler," *La Nouvelle Théologie* (blog), April 6, 2005, ressourcement.blogspot.com/2005/04/threads-interviews-david-schindler_06.html.

Although the political thought of D. C. Schindler, Hanby, and Jones has been assessed primarily as an alternative to integralism in the postliberal conversation, it is also significant as a development of the *Communio* tradition. Whereas de Lubac and Ratzinger were no less favorable to the political disestablishment of Christianity than Whig Thomists, now leading *Communio* thinkers join integralists in opposing it. Schindler, Hanby, and Jones claim that, as a matter of its own internal logic, Christianity must be politically established, and that Christendom, particularly its high medieval iteration, provides the basic template for this.⁸⁸ The present *Communio* thinkers, moreover, argue for political establishment precisely in terms of their distinctive understanding of the relationship between nature and grace, one that they largely share with de Lubac and Ratzinger. In other words, these writers think that their forebears were basically right about the relationship between nature and grace, and basically wrong about how to apply this relationship to political questions.

Lest this claim appear tendentious, it must be observed that Schindler, Hanby, and Jones reject a number of Ratzinger's political theses, without mentioning him by name. One of Ratzinger's key claims is that Christianity desacralized the state, so that the separation of religion and politics is part of its inherent logic.⁸⁹ Schindler acknowledges that Christianity introduced God's radical transcendence, and so taught the ancients that the world is not God and that man is not naturally divine. He adds, however, that transcendence is not separation, and that the new eschatological dimension does not exclude the institutionalization of Christianity, but demands it. Relying on the work of Jones, he approvingly cites the arrangements of the Middle Ages, where the king was never a priest himself, but was called "vicar of Christ" just as the pope was, and was consecrated as a mediator of the Church's sacramental order to the people.⁹⁰ These are exactly the sort of arrangements that Ratzinger rejected.⁹¹

Schindler considers the proposal that religion is a common good with an essentially social character in the sphere of civil society, without being regulated by state institutions except in the barest sense. This is, in a nutshell,

⁸⁸ Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 281; Jones, "End of Sovereignty," 436; Hanby, "For and Against Integralism," 48.

⁸⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 146–47.

⁹⁰ Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 257–59.

⁹¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 144; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 156–57; Ratzinger / Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1:39–40.

Ratzinger's dominant approach to the topic.⁹² Schindler replies that this proposal entails an inversion of the relationship between the whole and the parts, such that the integral common good (as represented by religion) becomes a part within the political good, which in turn becomes the whole as the only one given a priori.⁹³ In other words, Schindler regards the relationship between state and civil society that Ratzinger took for granted as another liberal distortion based on the inversion of true principles of order.

Schindler rejects another view that Ratzinger put forth: that the English, Scottish, or generally Anglo-American version of liberalism is gentler and more accommodating than the line of thought and praxis that derives from Rousseau.⁹⁴ Schindler calls the former "no less a radical revolution," and even claims that it is a much more radical revolution than Marxism, because it allows Christian tradition to exist in an unreal form.⁹⁵ In a similar vein, Hanby's "The Birth of Liberal Order" opposes the civic project of American Christianity, which he says consists of embracing Anglo-American liberalism.⁹⁶ Both writers say that America is anti-Catholic at its roots.⁹⁷

Ratzinger agreed with Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde's thesis that the modern liberal state is a *societas imperfecta*; that is, it needs moral values that the political sphere itself cannot secure.⁹⁸ In *Politics of the Real*, Schindler builds his own political theory around the idea that political order as such constitutes a *societas perfecta*, an expression borrowed from Aquinas. He explains that being a *societas perfecta* is the inescapable essence of political order, because it institutionalizes man's highest end, and so establishes the horizon of the common good.⁹⁹ In other words, political order is always concerned with the whole, and always plays a decisive role in forming citizens' souls regarding what is true and good. Consequently, reconceiving of the political order as a *societas imperfecta* destroys it, "because transforming it suggests it is being given a new form, a new order, and nothing incomplete can be a principle of order."¹⁰⁰

⁹² Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 201; Joseph Ratzinger, *Faith and Politics: Selected Writings* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018), 104–5.

⁹³ Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 90–92.

⁹⁴ Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 266; Ratzinger, *Faith and Politics*, 142.

⁹⁵ Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 267, 61.

⁹⁶ Hanby observes that this project spans both the theological and philosophical differences between Protestants and Catholics and the political differences between left and right ("Birth of Liberal Order," 55).

⁹⁷ Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 306; Hanby, "For and Against Integralism," 49.

⁹⁸ Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 194.

⁹⁹ Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 267.

¹⁰⁰ Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 265.

Jones observes that, in the 1950s, many saw the liberal democracies as living according to the moral law without an established religion, and thus without the revelation and grace that the Church had always asserted was necessary even for keeping the natural law; perhaps, he muses, the Church had been too harsh with the liberal strand of Enlightenment thought.¹⁰¹ As we have shown, Ratzinger made these claims throughout his political writings, most notably in the Christmas address of 2005.¹⁰² Jones replies by noting that the elites of the late twentieth century, like those of the Roman Empire, understood that the masses needed to believe in the gods and in the myths that justified the status quo: “This explains why we see in the post-war West the seemingly bizarre combination of elite thought dismantling the ‘Enlightenment Project’ piece-by-piece, exposing it for the fraud that it was, even while simultaneously buttressing the myths of ‘progress,’ ‘human rights,’ ‘freedom,’ and disinterested ‘science’ within the popular culture.”¹⁰³ For Jones, the Enlightenment project is a “fraud” cynically exploited by elites to maintain their hegemony. This is a stinging rebuttal of one of Ratzinger’s central political ideals.

It is difficult to say if Schindler, Hanby, and Jones have Ratzinger in mind when they formulate these criticisms. On the one hand, these ideas are the common property of a wide swath of Catholic commentators, and Ratzinger is better known for his work in other fields than in politics specifically. On the other hand, Ratzinger had a unique platform for expounding these views, and it seems unlikely that the three authors are unfamiliar with them, or that they could be totally unaware that they disagree with him on numerous fundamental points. What is certain, however, is that their work completes the postliberal turn in Anglophone *Communio* thought. Whereas David L. Schindler sought to enlist the work of his immediate predecessors in articulating his political vision (and thereby downplayed their disagreement), D. C. Schindler, Hanby, and Jones reject Ratzinger’s key political ideas, even if they do not mention him by name.

Beyond Ratzinger’s Republic

It seems that the dilemma we identified in Ratzinger’s political thought has been resolved, though perhaps in an unexpected way. In applying their basic theological principles to political questions, the Anglophone *Communio*

¹⁰¹ Jones, *Two Cities*, 292.

¹⁰² Benedict XVI, “Interpreting Vatican II,” 537–38.

¹⁰³ Jones, *Two Cities*, 293.

writers here discussed have eliminated one of the terms of Ratzinger's dilemma: the commitment to liberalism. For David L. and D. C. Schindler, Jones, and Hanby, the liberal state and its intellectual underpinnings do not need defending, much less reconciliation with Catholic Christianity, for these authors see the former as the enemy of the latter, and indeed of all human flourishing. The contrast is sharp: if Ratzinger is convinced that "the logic of liberalism" necessitates an "acknowledgement of the God of the Christian faith" and that "liberalism loses its own foundation when it leaves God out," D. C. Schindler avers that "at the theological core of liberalism is the most radical rejection of Christianity possible," Hanby thinks that "liberalism's original purpose . . . was the *prevention* of a Catholic political order, that is, a political order in which God is God," and Jones describes liberalism as "fundamentally incompatible with Catholicism . . . a sort of anti-Catholicism."¹⁰⁴

To be sure, there are historical reasons for this development. Ratzinger came of age in the mid-twentieth century and shared the general optimism about liberal democracy in countries that had been liberated by the United States during the Second World War. He thought it was time to abandon Church-state theories that were increasingly a source of embarrassment and that no longer had any real purchase in political life. By contrast, contemporary *Communio* thinkers have been affected by the mounting evidence of hostility between liberalism and Catholic Christianity. In such circumstances, it seems increasingly plausible to a larger group of intellectuals that, without a robust, public, and politically established Christian faith, the Western peoples cannot avoid sliding off into irrationality and social pathology. Yet we do not think that historical explanations alone are sufficient.

The intellectual vitality of postliberal thought lies in its ability to bring back the metaphysical and theological priorities of the Catholic tradition to the study of politics and to explain the unmistakably anti-Christian developments in liberal thought and regimes. Despite their differences on nature and grace, integralists and the *Communio* thinkers here discussed agree that Christianity ought to be politically established as a matter of its own internal logic, and they look to the history of Christendom for examples of such an establishment. The *Communio* writers have shown more convincingly than Ratzinger that there is a basic continuity between their coordinating theological ideas on nature and grace, faith and reason, and ecclesiology, on the one hand, and their views of social and political order, on the other. It is

¹⁰⁴ Ratzinger, *Faith and Politics*, 19, 20; Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 8; Hanby, "For and Against Integralism," 48; Jones, *Two Cities*, 212.

counterintuitive for Ratzinger to share those same coordinating theological ideas while condemning historical Christendom and arguing for religion within the limits of pure reason when it comes to politics. Quite simply, David L. and D. C. Schindler, Hanby, and Jones are superior as *Communio* thinkers on political questions. Their concepts are clearer, their mapping of nature and grace, faith and reason, and Church and state is more coherent, their penetration into the underlying philosophical and theological problems is deeper, and their respect for the tradition of Catholic political thought is more apparent.

The postliberals also have the upper hand in explaining recent anti-Christian liberalism. To account for this phenomenon, Ratzinger would point to the eclipse of God in the West and to factors internal to the Church that have weakened her public witness. At the level of Church–state arrangements, however, conditions after Vatican II were ripe for a period of flourishing according to Ratzinger’s narrative: the Church had finally abandoned her outdated and illegitimate claims to political power and returned to the teaching of Jesus and the early martyrs; the state had shown its capacity to live a healthy secularity according to the natural law, without recognizing the truth of the Christian religion or the need for its public worship. But the Catholic moment never came. Instead, regimes everywhere, especially in the West, have steadily dismantled legal respect for the natural law (to say nothing of the divine law), and Catholic politicians have not been conspicuous for resisting this development. One must conclude that the promise Ratzinger saw in the postwar regimes has been dashed. The narrative that *Communio* postliberals offer to explain these outcomes includes Ratzinger’s points about the eclipse of God and intra-ecclesial confusion and decadence, but situates these in a broader and deeper argument that demonstrates how recent anti-Christian developments express the unfolding of liberalism’s internal logic. Increasing numbers of young American Catholics have found this narrative compelling, which helps explain their exodus from Whig Thomism into various forms of Catholic postliberalism, including integralism.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ George Weigel regards the recent emergence of integralism as “one of the strangest phenomena in this season of many discontents” and levels the charge of Hegelian “historical determinism” against those who see in the Supreme Court’s *Obergefell* decision about same-sex marriage an unfolding of liberalism’s internal logic (“Games Intellectuals Play,” *First Things* [online], May 5, 2020, [firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/05/games-intellectuals-play](https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/05/games-intellectuals-play)). The issue at stake, however, is not determinism, but whether the postliberal or the Whig Thomist narrative is more compelling. Jones rightly points out that, “if Weigel’s version of the story is the best one, if the Church really did discover her true self by embracing liberalism, then we cannot face our current situation without acknowledging total failure” (“Catholic Ironies,” review of *The Irony of Modern*

Nevertheless, it is critical to see the distinctive place of the *Communio* writers in the current discussion. They are not integralists, for two main reasons. First, they reject the integralist understanding of the relationship between Church and state as the subordination of the latter to the former. The *Communio* authors regard this as yet another instance of the neo-Thomist tendency toward an extrinsicist understanding of nature–grace, which translates into a confusion of the relationship between authority and power. According to D. C. Schindler, this explains the inordinate attention that integralists give to the concepts of subordination and coercion. The *Communio* authors are far more ambivalent about the exercise of coercive power and where it stands in the order of priorities, an outlook they share with de Lubac and Ratzinger.¹⁰⁶

Second, D. C. Schindler, Hanby, and Jones criticize some integralists for moving too quickly from the speculative to the practical level. They think not only that the political establishment of Catholic Christianity is impossible under present conditions, but even that the desire for it as a means of “renewing America” evinces a pragmatism characteristic of the liberal inversion of priorities. The liberal order is so deeply corrupt, and so deeply corrupting of the people who live within it, that its tremendous power cannot be wielded for good in any comprehensive way. All three men draw attention to the noxious effects of technology and social media, and Hanby in particular faults certain writers for shifting too readily from the speculative to the practical and for turning integralism into an online

Catholic History, by George Weigel, *First Things*, no. 297 [November 2019]: 47). At the same time, Weigel does well to ask the postliberals where the teaching of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI about the democratic political order fits into their proposal. The *Communio* postliberals do not contradict the authoritative papal magisterium, but their opinions about the political order differ from those of Ratzinger and, perhaps, Wojtyła, although considering the latter is beyond our current scope.

¹⁰⁶ In a long footnote, D. C. Schindler distances himself and Hanby from the charge that they mean to replace power with the humility of the Cross, maintaining that “the official, juridical, public, and objective form of the Church is absolutely essential, and this will inevitably require the exercise of power in some respects” (*Politics of the Real*, 290n118). But he provides little in the way of specifics. Disagreement over the issue of coercive power is evident in the back-and-forth argument between Schindler and Waldstein over integralism; see Schindler, “Societas Perfecta: Neither Integralism Nor Disintegralism,” *New Polity* 1, no. 3 (2020): 24–45 (republished with some modifications as ch. 8 of *Politics of the Real*, 241–91); Edmund Waldstein, O.Cist., “Politics as a Sketch for the Church,” *New Polity* 2, no. 1 (2021): 6–32; Schindler, “Integralism as Fragmentation”; Edmund Waldstein, O.Cist., “The Analogy of Perfection,” *New Polity* 3, no. 1 (2022): 11–25. See also the exchange of letters between Jones, Hanby, and Waldstein in *First Things*, no. 326 (October 2022): 3–6.

brand.¹⁰⁷ These *Communio* thinkers are manifestly not building a political platform or pursuing a concrete electoral project. Although they may reject the term, Schindler's and Hanby's approach to contemporary politics can be described as quietist.¹⁰⁸ Jones offers more of a plan of action, but in terms of a "missionary insurgency" against the liberal order.¹⁰⁹

Some commentators have faulted postliberals for their alleged pessimism about America. The *Dobbs* verdict, according to this line of thinking, vindicates the strategy of working patiently within the system to achieve concrete results, rather than devising ineffective critiques.¹¹⁰ D. C. Schindler's reply is that genuine prudence is concerned primarily with truth, and only secondarily with the possible realization of that truth: "To suggest that it is worthwhile to reflect on some matter *only to the extent* that such reflection can make a worthwhile change or generate some desired outcome is to promote disorder in the strict sense, to make confusion a 'public thing.'" ¹¹¹ Hanby asks: "How often have the defenders of liberalism faulted its critics for failing to propose a viable alternative, as if impotence to found another social order absolved us of the obligation to think deeply about this one?" ¹¹² In other words, these thinkers are staking a claim on the truth of things,

¹⁰⁷ D. C. Schindler, "Social Media Is Hate Speech: A Platonic Reflection on Contemporary Misology," *Humanum* 9, no. 2 (2020): 33–38; Jones, *Two Cities*, 337–47. Hanby identifies Sohrab Ahmari, Gladden Pappin, and Adrian Vermeule as culprits ("Are We Postliberal Yet?"). We think, however, that Hanby's apparent rejection of the "postliberal" label in this article is unconvincing. Neither his refusal to identify with the term, nor his desire to avoid being swallowed up by the dynamics of social media and journalism, make his thought any less postliberal. D. C. Schindler and Jones, by contrast, have freely used the label to describe their work; see, e.g., Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 98–105, and Jones, "End of Sovereignty" (which is subtitled, "An Essay in Christian Postliberalism").

¹⁰⁸ In offering a proposal that is "neither a stratagem of power nor a strategy of self-preservation, but the recovery of a mystical vision, an intellectual apprehension of God at the innermost heart of reality," Hanby admits that this might seem like quietism, but insists that it is the opposite of quietism ("For and Against Integralism," 50). Nevertheless, we think that the appellation "quietism"—as long as this is understood not as *spiritual* quietism but as *political* quietism—helpfully characterizes Schindler's and Hanby's work and points to their distance from some contemporary integralists who have a more ambitious and immediate practical political schedule.

¹⁰⁹ Jones, "End of Sovereignty," 410.

¹¹⁰ George Weigel, "Dobbs and the Vindication of American Democracy," *First Things* (online), June 29, 2022, [firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/06/dobbs-and-the-vindication-of-american-democracy](https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/06/dobbs-and-the-vindication-of-american-democracy).

¹¹¹ Schindler, *Politics of the Real*, 302 (emphasis original; for the overall point, including on prudence, see 300–302).

¹¹² See Hanby, "For and Against Integralism," 46.

rather than on what will “work” in present circumstances.¹¹³ Hence, a *Communio* “politics of the real” is more of an intellectual inquiry than a political schedule of any kind.

The fact that both Ratzinger's dilemma and its resolution have gone largely unnoticed surely owes, at least in part, to the esteem he rightly earned among a wide swath of Catholic intellectuals. We too hold him in esteem, but we also think that such esteem does not preclude the exploration of problems in his thought. The basic dilemma of his political thought has proved so intractable that a number of his brightest intellectual heirs have moved quietly, yet unmistakably, beyond Ratzinger's republic into the fascinating yet uncertain future of postliberalism. N.V.

¹¹³ One could imagine any of our trio of postliberal *Communio* thinkers replying to these criticisms with the words of L. Brent Bozell: “The future belongs only to those who keep in touch with reality—that is, those who manage to keep open to Christ, who is Reality. You are certainly entitled to observe that the old Christian forms for sanctifying the public life have themselves become obsolete, and thus do not provide a sufficient guide for the future. But that is only to say that the quest for new forms will be difficult and will require all the energy and imagination and grace that are now in us and whatever more time will provide” (“Letter to Yourselves I,” in *The Best of Triumph* [Fort Royal, VA: Christendom College Press, 2001], 10–11; originally published as “Letter to Yourselves,” *Triumph*, March 1969, 11–14, and republished in *Communio* 23, no. 4 [1996]: 812–816, with a laudatory introduction from David L. Schindler).