

A Skeptical View of Integralism

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No observer of the American right could say that the past decade has been boring. In recent years, people who formerly called themselves conservatives have become integralists, “national conservatives,” “common good” conservatives, and “postliberals.” They reject the fusionism that formerly brought libertarians into alliances with paleo- and neo-conservatives. They argue that principles of limited government and individual rights no longer suffice in an age that has suffered the left’s Gramscian march through the institutions (Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, 1891–1937).

Among the most prominent of the new dissenters are certain Catholic conservatives who argue not only that “liberalism” has failed, but that the remedy for its failure lies in a reintegration of religion and politics. Many of these writers argue that liberalism itself is a religion, or at least a quasi-religion, that should be opposed by real religion, which is Catholic Christianity.¹ Liberalism’s political liturgy, they maintain, is one of individual rights, freedom, and unfettered choice; but liberalism is a bad religion that leads to moral decline. It must be resisted by holding to the true liturgy, an

¹ Liberalism, argues Adrian Vermeule, “is fundamentally theological. It wants to constantly celebrate the ritual of the overcoming of the past, the overcoming of darkness, the overcoming of repression in order to produce this perpetual liberation of the human person” (“Liberalism and the Rule of Law,” *The Postliberal Order*, December 8, 2022, postliberalorder.substack.com/p/liberalism-and-the-rule-of-law). Chad Pecknold writes that we are “ruled by a liberal dictatorship who demands of us a most perverse kind of worship. It is sometimes said that the progressive regime we live under is liturgical, or pseudo-religious, or some even will loosely refer to a ‘progressive integralism’” (“The Religious Nature of the City,” *The Postliberal Order*, January 24, 2022, postliberalorder.substack.com/p/the-religious-nature-of-the-city).

authentically religious one of obedience to Catholic doctrine and a revival of traditional morality in the public square. Who is responsible for enforcing this new liturgy? Why the new theorists themselves, of course, who believe that they are the recipients of privileged *gnosis*.

These theorists have no qualms about asserting the desirable unity of politics and religion. Indeed, their primary interest in government seems to be in prescribing a religiously inspired morality for those they would govern. No mere rule-of-law regime will do. As journalist Sohrab Ahmari has boldly asserted: “Civility and decency are secondary values. They regulate compliance with an established order and orthodoxy. We should seek to use these values *to enforce our order and our orthodoxy*.”²

The confidence of these former conservatives is remarkable, and they are in fact making converts of young men everywhere. The clarity of their moral vision is undeniably attractive to a certain kind of soul. If the highest good for mankind is salvation, as Christians believe it is, then why not strain every nerve to achieve it, not only in worship but also in political action? Chad Pecknold has summarized the postliberal integralist view as follows: “We must recognize that our cities simply are religious. Our most fundamental political conflicts are religious and theological. Thus, Christians who care about their neighbor must not be indifferent to the sacred bonds of the city, but must oppose civic sacrilege, and work to reorient the domestic and civic altars alike to God’s heavenly city.” He concludes with a rousing peroration: “As pilgrims with our faces set towards Christ, the bright sun of justice itself, our cause is just. We have a great hope even in this temporal order which is passing away; we have a high calling to order not only our souls, but also to order our cities rightly, *on earth as it is in heaven*.”³ The only task that remains, on this telling, is to put this vision into practice.

It is never easy to follow the words of Jesus himself in the Lord’s Prayer. Yet the skeptic in politics might be excused for a bit of throat-clearing and perplexity about precisely what is being argued, and about how such a grand vision is to be accomplished, or whether it is even desirable. In the pages that follow, I identify an alternative way of thinking about politics that is significantly less exalted than integralism. This more “skeptical” alternative is potentially capable of achievement, given the political institutions currently in place in the United States. It is also significantly more respectful of the political and moral pluralism that now exists and seems unlikely to disappear.

² Sohrab Ahmari, “Against David French-ism,” *First Things*, May 29, 2019, firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/05/against-david-french-ism (emphasis mine).

³ Pecknold, “Religious Nature of the City” (emphasis mine).

Following the lead of British political philosopher Michael Oakeshott, I consider two opposed ways of thinking about politics, which Oakeshott called, in *On Human Conduct*, “enterprise and civil association,” and elsewhere “faith and scepticism.” With this framework in mind, I consider the dark and pessimistic view of modern society held by the postliberal integralists. I turn next to evaluating the postliberal claim that government and religion ought to be joined in an elite-controlled, quasi-parental state. I conclude by returning to Oakeshott, offering some caveats about the possibility of a skeptical view of politics. In a world where everything seems political, is there still a place for the skeptic in politics?⁴

Oakeshott’s Ideal Types

Michael Oakeshott (1901–1990) was one of the most important British political philosophers of the twentieth century. His philosophical aim was always to get to the very essence of a thing, whether poetry or politics, and his method was often to write in terms of ideal types.⁵ He also strictly separated the realms of philosophy and practice, claiming that philosophical reflection merely illuminates what is going on in the world and does not guide it. He saw philosophy as a “radically subversive” activity that could not be put in the service of any practical goal. “If we expect from political philosophy conclusions relevant to politics,” he wrote, “the result will be either a political philosophy in which the reflective impulse is hindered and arrested by being made servile to politics, or a political activity in which the reflective impulse . . . has lost its virtue.”⁶ Philosophy, on this telling, does not direct or inform the practice of political actors. Its aim is “merely” to understand.

In theorizing politics, Oakeshott employs ideal types to capture a set of tendencies, inclinations, and motivating ideas that political actors exhibit in varying degrees. In day-to-day life these may be mixed together, often appearing ambiguous. A public official, for instance, may declare himself a staunch progressive while in practice he pursues a moderate course; or someone may claim no label at all and act primarily on the basis of pragmatic considerations. In such cases we see mixtures of types, alloys of political ideologies and platforms.

Oakeshott, however, abstracts from ordinary human activity, with all

⁴ Oakeshott uses the British spelling of “sceptic.” I will use the British spelling only when quoting him directly.

⁵ This use of “ideal” implies, of course, not “best,” but rather “in the realm of ideas.”

⁶ Michael Oakeshott, *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 155.

its inconsistency and lack of clarity, to set out the fundamental tendencies that compose a purer kind of idea. Only with these ideal types in mind does he eventually turn back to theorizing practice, showing how the types make their appearance in life as we actually experience it. He uses induction to construct his types, followed by deduction *from* these types, to show what they illuminate in ordinary social and political life. Examples of this method appear in his contrast between the morality of custom and the morality of reflection in his essay in *Rationalism in Politics* called “The Tower of Babel,” and the distinction between enterprise and civil association in *On Human Conduct*. For the purposes of this paper, most relevant is the distinction between faith and skepticism in *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*.

Oakeshott relies on concrete political history and texts in the inductive process of constructing his ideal types. In this concrete evidence he finds that some societies drew on traditional modes of morality even in the midst of social change; others, like revolutionary France, were more prone to formulating principles that claimed to guide practice. Oakeshott maintains that the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights, for example, were documents invented by people who *thought* they were doing “reflective” morality—that is, setting out for the first time a set of principles for political action. But they were actually just distilling and repackaging an older English political experience.⁷ It was old wine in new bottles.

Oakeshott’s ultimate aim, however, is not the construction of a blended form, choosing some characteristics from one ideal type and some from the other to construct something new. Instead, he sees these types as explanatory or descriptive of actual political practice in all its ambiguity. In some ways, for example, a person may be more “habitually” moral, and in other ways more “reflective.” Any particular person exists as some combination of the two tendencies. Perhaps one is reflectively moral in a crisis (“what should I do in this ethical dilemma?”) but habitually moral in all the normal goings-on of life. We exist between the poles, but do not exactly synthesize them into a new, coherent form of morality.

Certain people and social movements do, however, incline strongly toward one or the other of these types; and the types themselves offer explanatory clarity and insight into how people understand themselves and their

⁷ See the discussion of the American founding in his essay “Rationalism in Politics,” found in Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1991), 32–33.

projects. As John Grove has argued persuasively, these types provide an apt lens for understanding the contemporary integralist movement.⁸

The Politics of Faith

In *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, Oakeshott presents his reader with two quite different political orientations. The “politics of faith” should not be mistaken for modern Christian politics generally, and certainly not for “the Christian Right.” The politics of faith is also not an approach to religion and public life that respects believers of any and every faith. Instead, the “politics of faith” is a technical phrase into which Oakeshott pours his own meaning.

What precisely is this meaning? The faith referenced here is faith *in government* to move mankind toward a state of greater perfection. In the politics of faith, “human perfection is sought precisely because it is not present; and further, it is believed that we need not, and should not, depend upon the working of divine providence for the salvation of mankind.” Human perfection is both sought and achieved by faith “in human power.” It depends upon “our own unrelaxed efforts.” Ultimately, it is motivated by the idea that “man is redeemable in history.” It is “both relevant and revealing to speak of this style of politics as ‘Pelagian.’”⁹

Despite its name, this vision is markedly at odds with orthodox understandings of religious faith. First, the politics of faith tends to immanentize ultimate fulfillment, and second, it requires human effort, not divine action. It betrays both dissatisfaction and impatience with the world and unwillingness to accept our mortal condition. Instead of enjoying the goods that are presently available, people invest themselves in future outcomes which range from the ethical and religious—“moral virtue or religious salvation”—to the temporal: prosperity, abundance or basic welfare.¹⁰ Both kinds of outcomes share several characteristics: a focus on the future, a notion of perfection bolstered by moral confidence in the rightness of pursuing it, and the idea that government must be the chief enabler of this pursuit.

Government, indeed, is at the center of the vision proffered by the politics of faith. Government is never auxiliary to the activities that are already going on, no mere umpire or judiciary. Instead, the institutions of government offer the “means for arriving at the ‘truth,’ for excluding ‘error’ and for making the

⁸ See John Grove, “The Post-liberal Politics of Faith,” *National Affairs* 55 (Spring 2023).

⁹ Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 23.

¹⁰ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 24.

'truth' prevail."¹¹ Government is omnicompetent, and it positively welcomes power: "No quantity of power will be considered excessive."¹² Its office is "to direct and integrate all the activities of its subjects."¹³ According to this understanding, the intermediate institutions that formerly stood between government and the individual should gradually disappear; centralization of power is not a problem but an advance.

Although the politics of faith should never be simply conflated with religious faith, as I have noted above, this style of politics nevertheless appears in two idioms: the economic and the religious. In the economic version of the politics of faith, the powers of government are directed toward economic well-being and prosperity for society as a whole. This, at present, is by far the more common and recognizable version of a politics of faith. Every modern government aims at achieving economic goods. The perfection sought in this version of the politics of faith consists of a high standard of living, and values that promote it are frugality, industry, and diligence.

The less obviously recognizable idiom of the politics of faith is the religious version. Here, government attempts not to raise the general standard of living but to impose a particular religious pattern of activity upon its subjects. Its aim is to save souls. Government's task becomes the enforcement of a model of conduct and religious observance because it is "believed to have been found in the Bible."¹⁴ One might think here of Jean Calvin's Geneva as a model for a religiously inspired politics of faith.

And what of the governors themselves? They are confident and self-assured, not given to doubt or humility. They do not shun office, but seek it. Governing attracts those who are "not men of moderation and self-control, . . . but either the neurotic and the frustrated who know no bounds or the parvenu who is easily intoxicated by the chance of doing big and clever things."¹⁵ Governors or would-be governors are those people who have clearly done some thinking—and who think not just about their own good but about the good of everyone else. Or, perhaps more accurately, they are not so much concerned about the real, self-chosen goods of others, but rather would like everyone to pursue *their* favored goods. Given enough power, they just might be successful.

¹¹ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 27.

¹² Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 28.

¹³ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 46.

¹⁴ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 59.

¹⁵ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 102.

The Politics of Skepticism

Oakeshott's contrary ideal type is the "politics of scepticism." In this understanding of politics, government is deprived of its role as director of a society's activities, no longer determining the "common good" for all. Instead, governing is reconceived as something mundane, rather unexciting, and absolutely necessary. It springs not from a doctrine of human nature, but from a particular "reading of human conduct," which is varied and pluralistic. As Oakeshott explains it, the skeptic in politics begins with no overarching theory, but merely observes that "men live in proximity with one another and, pursuing various activities, are apt to come into conflict with one another."¹⁶ Government's aim is to minimize the opportunities for conflict.

For the skeptic, therefore, governing is not so much a legislative or executive, but rather a "judicial" activity.¹⁷ To quote the famous but much-neglected words of Alexander Hamilton, a judiciary has "neither force nor will, but merely judgment."¹⁸ And while no existent judicial power has ever wholly conformed to this ideal, something like it is what Oakeshott admires in the politics of skepticism. Politics here is not a winner-take-all contest, where the victors impose their vision upon everyone else, but instead a relatively boring enforcement of rules of conduct, trade, and contracts. Nobody, in skeptical politics, would desire office for the power it brings; instead, they govern out of duty, remembering that those who occupy government offices are men "of the same make as the subjects they rule—men, that is to say, who are always liable, when they become governors, to . . . impose upon the community an 'order' particularly favourable to their own interests." For this reason, writes Oakeshott in an understatement, it would be prudent to "be sparing of the quantity of power invested in government."¹⁹

As a corollary to this minimalist understanding, Oakeshott claims that the proper role of government is only to maintain order, not to pursue grand projects. The superficial order obtained thereby "is not everything; . . . we shall do well not to spend upon it more of our resources than is necessary for

¹⁶ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 32.

¹⁷ Oakeshott observes that Parliament originated as a court of law in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and concludes that, "where governing is recognized as the activity of a court, the office of government" will not be understood "as the imposition of a comprehensive pattern of activity upon all the subjects of the realm" (*Politics of Faith*, 77–79).

¹⁸ Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist No. 78*.

¹⁹ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 33.

its preservation.”²⁰ Or, as he wrote in a 1939 essay “The Claims of Politics,” politics “is a highly specialized and abstracted form of communal activity; it is conducted on the surface of the life of a society and except on rare occasions makes remarkably small impression below that surface.”²¹ So far from being the most important activity a person might take up, it is among the least personally meaningful. And it does not require a particularly sharp mind. “A limitation of view, which appears so clear and practical, but which amounts to little more than a mental fog, is inseparable from political activity.”²² Indeed, the philosophical attitude is often directly at odds with the disposition to engage in political action, as philosophers from Plato to Oakeshott have repeatedly observed.

This restrained vision—that political activity is important for ensuring order but far less worthy of enthusiasm than most people think—constitutes an unusual political philosophy, to be sure. Political activity, writes Oakeshott, “is one among a hundred other [activities] and it is superior to the whole complex . . . only in . . . overseeing all from the standpoint of public order.”²³ He is unconvinced that politics is mankind’s most important activity, or that government is uniquely suited to impose “a single moral or other direction, tone, or manner upon the activities of its subjects.”²⁴

Yet this minimalist understanding of governing does not imply that individuals should never pursue ambitious projects of their own; they are certainly free to do so, and indeed Oakeshott thinks they will. He hopes, however, that a coterie of government elites might not attempt to impose “a single moral or other direction, tone, or manner” upon the activities of those they govern. Oakeshott’s vision is respectful of the variety among human beings in occupation and self-understanding. The skeptic in politics need not believe “as a matter of principle, in the absolute value of variety in human conduct.” Rather, he observes only “that such variety exists” and that neither he nor anyone else has the authority “to destroy it.”²⁵

To sum up, then: Oakeshott’s two ideal political types are faith and skepticism. Faith in this context means faith in government and its purposes, in the moral rightness of promulgating and imposing a particular mundane, moral or religious vision upon those governed. In this vision, ambitious men eagerly seek office; they hope by political action to transform the world. Skepticism

²⁰ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 32.

²¹ Oakeshott, *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 93.

²² Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 93.

²³ Oakeshott, “On Being Conservative,” 432–33.

²⁴ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 35.

²⁵ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 36.

offers a markedly different vision in which government is deprived of most of its character as a source of excitement and purpose. It is reconceived as an activity aiming merely at the maintenance of order. Government respects human difference and the variety of endeavors that people choose to pursue. Governors exercise restraint and moderation, a disinterestedness which, Oakeshott laments, is always absent.²⁶

Contemporary integralism—of the sort advocated by American academics and journalists—is a clear example of the politics of faith. Oakeshott takes great pains to point out that real-world politics almost never fall exclusively within one or the other of the ideal types; yet it is difficult to find anything in integralism that is at all skeptical. Most notably, integralism explicitly links politics and religion, and therefore also politics and morality. American integralists have few qualms about seeking a certain kind of earthly perfection, or at least improvement toward a more explicitly Christian polity.

Integralism also has a clear vision for society as a whole, and integralists want to put that vision into practice. This vision “is determined by [the] ruler’s *a priori* vision of human flourishing,” and integralists “don’t shrink from declaring that they know what a healthy society looks like or that it is government’s job to refashion society with that end in mind.”²⁷ Perhaps most strikingly, government itself is the prime mover in the achievement of this vision. Integralism is not a bottom-up movement, but instead top-down. In the words of Adrian Vermeule: “Promoting a substantive vision of the good is, always and everywhere, the proper function of rulers.”²⁸

I am well aware that marshalling Oakeshott’s arguments about a proper understanding of politics will be of no use at all in persuading the integralists themselves that their vision is mistaken or only partially correct. Oakeshott and others like him constitute precisely the classical liberal world that integralism opposes *by definition*. Commentators have pointed out that the most appropriate objections to integralism must come from within the Catholic tradition itself if they are to gain any traction.²⁹

Nevertheless, legitimate critique may also come from outside the Catholic

²⁶ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 38. As Grove observes, the politics of faith “was the dominant style of politics when Oakeshott was writing, and it remains so today” (“The Post-liberal Politics of Faith,” 136).

²⁷ Grove, “The Post-liberal Politics of Faith,” 135.

²⁸ Adrian Vermeule, “Beyond Originalism,” *The Atlantic*, March 31, 2020, theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/common-good-constitutionalism/609037/.

²⁹ Kevin Augustyn, “The Integralist Argument Is Wrong, Even If You’re Catholic,” *Discourse*, January 27, 2022, discoursemagazine.com/ideas/2022/01/27/the-integralist-argument-is-wrong-even-if-youre-catholic/.

intellectual world, on the basis of somewhat different first principles, based not in theory but in commonsense: that the integralist view of contemporary American society is profoundly one-sided and in certain respects simply wrong, and that individuality and freedom, rightly understood, are great goods. Importantly, the integralist vision appears to rest on a diagnosis of our present social and cultural situation as entirely and unremittingly bad, a point that I shall dispute.

For those who stand outside integralism, therefore, there is benefit in seeing and identifying several central tendencies of the movement: its unfailing negativity toward all aspects of liberal modernity and its eagerness to use “top-down” government power in service of integralist aims. Let me take these two points in turn, before returning to Oakeshott’s types at the end.

Integralism’s Declinist Diagnosis

If integralism offers the therapy for the ills of liberal modernity, who or what has *caused* the predicament of contemporary social and political life? To read the contemporary American integralists as a more or less unified whole is to see that central to their project is the categorization of all non-integralists into groups that exhibit glaring defects and share responsibility for what integralism describes as America’s thoroughgoing decline. They generally classify all non-integralists as liberals, which is bad enough, since “liberalism” is understood as the source of all social ills. But among liberals there are both progressive “left-liberals” and “right-liberals.” Certain individuals are particularly noxious representatives of these groups: Nikole Hannah-Jones for the left-liberals and David French for the right-liberals. Right-liberals are sometimes referred to as “Con. Inc.,” a derisive name for Establishment conservatives at places like American Enterprise Institute, The Heritage Foundation, and The Wall Street Journal. Integralists often accuse such people of “amnesia” and “obfuscation.”³⁰

Both groups fear state power, writes Vermeule, but only when it suits them. Progressive “left-liberals,” Vermeule observes, fear the state when the topic is abortion, as opposed to “hate speech.” But the right-liberal who cites Edmund Burke and Oakeshott “remains resolutely silent about the endless disruption of traditional ways of life and local communities by transnational corporate power.” Each, “in his or her own way tells us, quite clearly, what

³⁰ Patrick Deneen, “On Common Good Constitutionalism: A Discussion of Adrian Vermeule’s Pathbreaking Book on Its Anniversary,” *Postliberals* (podcast), February 21, 2023, MP3 audio, 3:38, postliberalorder.substack.com/p/on-common-good-constitutionalism.

program is served by the rhetoric of skepticism.”³¹ Vermeule does not believe that either group’s skepticism about political power is actually sincere. The implication is that each group, if able, would use power for its own purposes in order to crush opponents.

Integralism sees left-liberals as primarily responsible for the enormities of modern culture: the sexual revolution, the transgender movement, the diversity-equity-inclusion (DEI) regime, the corruption of language, and Drag Queen Story Hour. But the right-liberals do not fare much better. Just as an intra-Church fight is often uglier than a dispute between denominations, the integralist critique of “Con. Inc.” displays exceptional vitriol. In critiquing right-liberals at *Ius and Iustitium*, for example, an anonymous writer accuses French and his friends of “setting upon” those integralists “who would vindicate tradition, truth and sanity.” French and company, this anonymous writer claims, are “throw[ing] their lot in with progressives who would, given the chance, gladly confiscate and trans-mutilate their children.”³² Patrick Deneen comments that right-liberals are “toothless” in their opposition to progressivism, offering only “a flaccid ‘originalism’ that consistently drifts leftward.”³³ Right-liberals, he continues, “are engaged in long term hospice care of a terminal patient—America.”³⁴

In his characteristic take-no-prisoners style, Ahmari asserts that “American conservatism is ... a failure” and launches into a Covid-era jeremiad worth quoting in full:

We’re prisoners in our own abode. On TV, a perpetual carousel of experts blasts bad news and grim statistics. Our children, if we have them, are absorbed in their own screens, barred from the swing and the see-saw even as the warm weather beckons them outside. We

³¹ Adrian Vermeule, “Skepticism and the State,” *The Postliberal Order*, December 21, 2022, postliberalorder.substack.com/p/skepticism-and-the-state.

³² Anonymous, “The Iron Law of Tolerance,” *Ius and Iustitium* (blog), February 27, 2023, iusetiustitium.com/the-iron-law-of-tolerance/.

³³ Patrick Deneen, “Abandoning Defensive Crouch Conservatism,” *The Postliberal Order*, November 17, 2021, postliberalorder.substack.com/p/abandoning-defensive-crouch-conservatism.

³⁴ Patrick Deneen, “Conservative Hospice Care,” *The Postliberal Order*, December 29, 2021, <https://postliberalorder.substack.com/p/conservative-hospice-care>. Vermeule has a similar diagnosis: “The problem is not whether liberalism is in some abstract sense desirable, for its eventual demise is inevitable. The only practical problem is how to shorten and lessen the birth-pangs of liberalism’s successor” (“Integration from Within,” *American Affairs* 2, no. 1 [2018], americanaffairsjournal.org/2018/02/integration-from-within/).

might be furloughed or laid-off, and even if lucky enough to be working remotely, we watch anxiously as the pink slips climb the social ladder: *How long can I hang on to my rung?* We can't sleep at night. We're glued to the ghostly blue glow of our smart devices, endlessly scrolling the social feed, futilely arguing with strangers. A huge number of us also switch our browsers to incognito mode, to watch fleshy, moaning digital phantoms; the medium has somehow conditioned us to forget that these are real human beings, engaging in an act rightly ordered to bringing *new life* into the world. Outside, the streets are deserted; the few faces we encounter, masked, suspicious, alien. Flying police robots blare orders at citizens. And if we're unlucky enough to live in urban cores, we're at grave risk of having life and property destroyed by rioters and antifa terrorists exploiting a genuine case of police injustice. Liberty, indeed.

And in the words of Chad Pecknold, since we are “cracking up at the brutal end of liberal order, it is unsurprising that we find ourselves tyrannized by all manner of Lust—*libido*—sexual, economic and political.” Government buildings are now “regularly lit up with false flags, which reflect not only a fundamental disordering of the familial substrate, but also the temple which worships its lusts. These are the banners of a society which has turned its back on God — the banners of Sodom, Herod and Nero.”³⁵ Integralists never understate moral peril.

These overwrought descriptions of modern life emerge from an experience of the world that is digitally mediated, especially through the platform of Twitter. Such descriptions derive their force from the selective and polemical inclusion of certain facts and not others. Such cultural declinism has long been a tendency and a temptation for many on the political right. It is a simple and persuasive narrative that makes sense of cultural failures and defeats: things were better in the past; bad people have seized power; now political and cultural trends are moving in the wrong direction. For the integralists, the obvious conclusion of this line of reasoning is that they must seize power and change the trajectory. As Vermeule has put it: “What is at stake is no less than authority, the full authority of a reasoned political order, composed of both temporal and spiritual powers in right relation to the natural and divine law, that would put a mere Rome to shame.”³⁶

³⁵ Chad Pecknold, “Unfurling the Right Banners,” *The Postliberal Order*, December 23, 2022, postliberalorder.substack.com/p/unfurling-the-right-banners.

³⁶ Adrian Vermeule, “Liberalism’s Good and Faithful Servants,” *Compact*, February 28, 2023, compactmag.com/article/liberalism-s-good-and-faithful-servants.

The counterview is simple and obvious, though unpopular among integralists and others who advance the declinist view: contemporary culture is not a uniform parade of horrors.³⁷ One can easily list both advances and declines. The declines are evident because they are constantly highlighted, especially by right-leaning commentators with an agenda to pursue. But the advances are often downplayed or overlooked altogether. One could cite the substantial improvement in the developed world's standard of living and the elimination of absolute poverty for many millions of others; notable advances in healthcare and cures for certain types of cancer; the rise of Christianity in the Global South; the rejuvenation of Catholic and traditionalist Anglican parishes in the United States among millennials; the rise of Christian classical schools and charter schools as an alternative to public education, and the list goes on.

Still, a tempered and temperate view like this one does not possess the appealing simplicity of the declinist view.³⁸ It neither incites people to vigorous action nor yields a clear and unambiguous vision of culture that can be put in one's pocket, to be taken out and deployed when needed. This temperate view is usually held by adult conservatives who tend toward moderation and away from radical political action. Such conservatives hope to preserve the many social goods that are often taken for granted, goods that persist even amidst other signs of decline. I have no intention of making the opposite claim from declinism—that America's social and cultural fortunes are advancing and that things are always and everywhere getting better. But there are legitimate objections to the pervasive declinist view that underlies the integralist project.

The first objection has to do with the range of vision assumed by integralist declinism. The examples quoted above from Deneen, Pecknold, Vermeule, and Ahmari emerge from assessments that focus on the political "horizon." Looking only at the horizon—that is, at national politics and national trends, at events highlighted by major media outlets and featured on social media—tempts an observer to see only the most awful happenings: the shootings, the

³⁷ For a brief history of declinism in America, see Alan W. Dowd, "Declinism," Hoover Institution, August 1, 2007, [hoover.org/research/declinism](https://www.hoover.org/research/declinism).

³⁸ The integralist declinist view goes generally as follows: "America was flawed from the start. The focus on individual rights comes at the expense of community and the common good, and the claim that government exists to preserve individual liberty creates an inexorable move toward moral anarchy. These tendencies have moved us so far from traditional decency and public order that there is little of worth left to 'conserve'" (Joseph E. Capizzi, "Integralism and International Order," *Providence*, September 6, 2018, providencemag.com/2018/09/catholic-church-integralism-international-order/).

overdoses, the floods and droughts, the excesses of politics. Of course these are real events, and they do not go away because we ignore them.

Yet declinists are prone to the dangers of “confirmation bias” and “negativity bias.” Once one has decided that political and social life is in freefall, then it is easy to consult only sources that confirm that judgment (confirmation bias). When stories and topics are chosen selectively to emphasize certain pathologies of culture, they reinforce that particular narrative in the minds of those who share such stories. Eventually, if we read enough of this, we come to believe it is everywhere. As Thucydides wrote long ago: “It is a habit of mankind to entrust to careless hope what they long for, and to use sovereign reason to thrust aside what they do not fancy.”³⁹

Declinists are also especially prone to “negativity” bias, which means that, “in most situations, [they judge] negative events [to be] more salient, potent, dominant in combinations and generally efficacious than positive events.”⁴⁰ In layman’s terms, catastrophes are always more noteworthy than ordinary happy events. If someone has decided that the world is an inhospitable and dark place, then this judgment will generally be confirmed by the great number of dark and depressing things that do happen on any given day.

Nevertheless, such events generally do not constitute ordinary human lives in particular places with others whom one actually knows. A careful look at what may be taking place in local communities yields the observation that civic organizations, churches, synagogues, families, and schools are undertaking many constructive projects, despite the apparent chaos of the wider world. Declinist narratives, in contrast, tend to be cast at levels of abstraction that do not reflect life as it is lived by actual human beings. One might read endlessly about the harms of transgenderism or the overreach of the DEI movement on university campuses. This repeated exposure would, of course, have a significant impact on a person’s continuous assessment of the world around him. And yet this person may never have experienced anything like the dramatic events about which he spends so much time reading.

A second insight, which follows from this quasi-localist view, is that it is easy to underestimate the diversity of life in contemporary America, especially if one lives in a large urban area or on the coasts. Large corporations and woke capital do not dictate behavior in every arena of life; and though Target, Starbucks, and Apple are ubiquitous in cities everywhere, certain regions of the country are far more naturally conservative than others. In

³⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Dover, 2017), 215.

⁴⁰ Paul Rozin and Edward B. Royzman, “Negativity Bias, Negativity Dominance, and Contagion,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5, no. 4 (2001): 297.

other words, the paganism of large cities on the East and West Coasts is not necessarily what one sees in Texas or Nebraska.

Nor are colleges and universities monolithic. Although one often hears about the most progressive schools or the ones at the center of scandals, many professors and students pay little attention to such stories and go about their business without feeling that they are under siege. The landscape of higher education includes not only progressive schools like Oberlin, Reed, and Yale, but also countercultural campuses like Wyoming Catholic, the University of Dallas, Ave Maria, and Hillsdale. Secondary schools vary just as widely—from the elite Ivy League-feeder kindergartens of New York City to the many campuses of the Classical Christian school renaissance. Dutch immigrants with large families still live in Holland, Michigan, and northern California; the Bruderhof community has established itself in upstate New York and elsewhere; and many young Catholics, Anglicans, and Evangelicals across the country are having children at the rate people did in the early twentieth century.

People are always learning to play the violin, to weld, and to fly-fish. They start new journals and engage in charitable and philanthropic work. They tutor kids after school, build businesses, get married, become athletes and scholars. Sometimes they recover from addictions and begin new lives. In short, they are attending to life on the personal and communal level. If one looks only at social media, international politics, or the national news, then one might be tempted to despair. But unless we work in government or journalism, events in these realms usually do not constitute the stuff of our daily lives.

This alternative story matters because integralism depends for its moral force upon a severe declinist view, which provides the foundation for integralism's decidedly nonliberal remedial proposals. If, indeed, we are at the "brutal end of liberal order" and crisis is immediately at hand, then maybe there is a case for drastic measures. If, however, the case against liberalism has been overstated, or if there might yet be resources within the liberal tradition that could be profitably used for good, then perhaps a more temperate, "bottom-up" rejuvenation of culture is a more appropriate response. This does not initially seem as inspiring as integralism's call to action, to be sure. Political moderation is never exciting.⁴¹

By contrast, the declinist story, bolstered by the divide-and-conquer attacks on former adversaries who have now been exposed as frauds and

⁴¹ See for example, Aurelian Craiutu, *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in an Age of Extremes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

obfuscators, justifies the stamping out of pluralism and the tearing down of institutions that still function.⁴² From the perspective of integralism, moral pluralism is really just another name for moral error.⁴³ In its breathless moral panic, integralism is the mirror image of far-left environmentalism and extreme racial and sexual DEI movements. All these movements—left and right—identify society-wide problems that are at least grounded in reality; all exaggerate the problems; all are assured of the truth and goodness of their causes; and all would be happy to stamp out their opponents. As Ahmari has candidly stated, civility and decency are second-order virtues that can be dispensed with in an emergency. Such is the posture assumed by partisans of the “politics of faith.”

Integralism’s Embrace of Elite Government Power

This declinist story of breakdown and dysfunction provides the moral justification for the integralist project to reorder society. This is why they cannot embrace the idea of incremental changes. Only a fundamental rejection of the existing liberal order will satisfy, because it is liberalism itself that has caused the problems. Their proposed solution therefore emerges not from social, church and familial rejuvenation, or from within existing political structures, but instead through strong government directed by powerful elites.

There is no little irony in the fact that American integralists hate progressive elites with a white-hot passion yet are keen to act as elites themselves.⁴⁴ As Vermeule observes: “Committed minorities have often been able to set the terms of political life for large, relatively apathetic majorities.”⁴⁵ This

⁴² Typical of the attacks on former allies is this from an author who goes by 1P5 Editor: “But just as strongly, the true integralist will be the enemy of the conservatives when he comes for their mindless accumulation of wealth, their usury, their fractional reserve banking, their diabolical stock market, and their war on the poor” (“Integralism is Christendom, Pt. I,” *One Peter 5*, January 31, 2022, onepeterfive.com/integralism-is-christendom-pt-i/).

⁴³ James Dominic Rooney writes that integralists “judge [John] Rawls’ ‘fact of pluralism’ a symptom of social disunity and therefore a political problem, not a neutral social datum around which to structure politics.” “Illiberal Integralist Elites,” *Law & Liberty*, January 3, 2023, lawliberty.org/illiberal-integralist-elites/).

⁴⁴ See Patrick Deneen’s critique of elitism: “Americans of both parties once believed that no center of power in America should become so concentrated that it could force its views on every other citizen” (“Replace the Elite,” *First Things*, March 2020, firstthings.com/article/2020/03/replace-the-elite).

⁴⁵ Adrian Vermeule, “‘It Can’t Happen’; or, the Poverty of Political Imagination,” *The Postliberal Order*, November 19, 2021, postliberalorder.substack.com/p/it-cant-happen-or-the-poverty-of.

has ensured many progressive victories; why then should a small group of integralists not do the same, from the opposite ideological direction? The difference, of course, is that integralists are in possession of capital-T Truth: “We are in a vastly better speculative position than those 1970s transgressive minorities: we have a true vision of the good, and the religion that truly integrates and elevates,” asserts Chad Pecknold.⁴⁶

In addition to these truth claims, integralism’s elitism also derives from a certain view of human nature: they view most adult human beings as incapable of governing themselves, not unlike minor children. Instead of understanding others as equals who prioritize different goods, integralists prefer to act as authoritative parents. Vermeule explains this approach without apology: “Law is parental, a wise teacher and an inculcator of good habits. Just as authority in rulers can be exercised for the good of subjects, if necessary even *against the subjects’ own perceptions* of what is best for them—perceptions that may change over time anyway, as the law teaches, habituates, and re-forms them.” Subjects, he confidently continues, “will come to thank the ruler whose legal strictures, possibly experienced at first as coercive, encourage subjects to form more authentic desires for the individual and common goods, *better habits*, and beliefs that better track and promote communal well-being.”⁴⁷ It is not clear what justifies this presumption of future thankfulness, but civic peace depends upon it.

However, the case for elitism is not merely that elites can and should exercise their parental authority in the interest of morally malformed political children. Ruling also requires knowledge and expertise that ordinary citizens simply do not possess. In the integralist case, notes James Dominic Rooney, this expertise may be partially grounded in knowledge of Catholic doctrine. But at bottom it is the familiar “illiberal picture of political legitimacy.” In this illiberal picture, “only a sub-set of actual citizens are reliable reasoners about what is in the common interest, and so only such a subset is relevant to the justification of public policies. Call this subset ‘the experts.’” If legitimate political authority—and perhaps even basic political participation—depends on expertise, then all nonexperts can exist only in the role of subjects, not citizens. Rulers, writes Rooney, “can and ought to act for [the subjects] without their consent, even to the point of using coercive laws or policies for their benefit, over their objections.”⁴⁸ Rooney does not approve this view himself, but he sets it out even more starkly than do the

⁴⁶ Pecknold, “Religious Nature of the City.”

⁴⁷ Vermeule, “Common Good Constitutionalism.”

⁴⁸ Rooney, “Illiberal Integralist Elites.”

integralists. It is exactly the illiberal or “postliberal” model that they would like to put into practice.

Yet the integralist model of parental rulership is problematic in a deeply pluralist nation like the United States. One wonders first whether it is legitimate, and second, whether it has any hope of success. Most people would likely agree that biological parents certainly have an obligation to shape and form their children in the interest of giving them a vision of a well-lived life and the means to achieve it. Yet children do not remain minors forever, eventually entering into legal adulthood whether or not we judge them ready. At this point, they have the burden (and opportunity) of making choices for themselves and of handling the consequences that flow from those choices. In general, at this point, they are better positioned to make choices for themselves than are their parents, though of course they may take advice and guidance from all kinds of authorities. Something like this is what we normally mean by calling them “free,” or saying that they possess liberty.

Here is the heart of the conflict I have been describing. For integralism, liberty is not an opportunity, but a *problem*. People often do not make the choices that integralists recommend; instead they do things that integralists see as misguided, at best, and positively sinful, at worst. Their solution for this problem is therefore to curtail liberty through strong parental government.

But the fundamental question remains unanswered: *why* should any normal adult accept the idea that government officials and citizens are simply analogous to parents and children? Parents have a uniquely personal and close tie to children they “rule.” Parents demonstrate both love for their children and interest in their unique, individual goods. Parents have more knowledge and experience than their children and are capable of specifying and pursuing the common good of the family. By contrast, “the state” is amorphous, distant, and uninformed about particulars. It knows nothing of individuals and their circumstances.

Vermeule nevertheless argues that a powerful executive state “is a means of protecting the many from exploitation by the oligarchic few,” and that “the many [will] support and ally themselves with a powerful executive . . . in order to protect themselves from economic and social exploitation by *optimates*, oligarchs, nobility, corporations, or other self-interested private powers.”⁴⁹ Clearly he has “woke corporations” and progressive elites in his sights. A powerful executive, staffed with “good” people, can indeed do a great deal. One has to suppose that he sees himself as part of that executive power.

⁴⁹ Adrian Vermeule, “The Many, the Few, and the State,” *The Postliberal Order*, January 14, 2023, postliberalorder.substack.com/p/the-many-the-few-and-the-state.

Perhaps, he muses, the decadent liberal framework itself can be repurposed for integralist ends: “It may thus appear providential that liberalism, despite itself, has prepared a state capable of great tasks, as a legacy to bequeath to a new and doubtless very different [nonliberal] future.” The very bureaucracy that liberalism has created “in pursuit of a mirage of depoliticized governance may, by the invisible hand of Providence, be turned to new ends, becoming the great instrument with which to restore a substantive politics of the good.”⁵⁰ Far from embracing bottom-up reforms of politics and culture, this vision explicitly embraces government as the essential impetus for reform. This view happily dispenses with old conservative shibboleths about the evils of big government. Bureaucracy—if infiltrated and controlled by the right people—could become our friend, “the *strong hand of legitimate rule*.”⁵¹

But obvious questions arise. Where is the assurance that this powerful executive (and the bureaucracy and judiciary it controls) will act in the interest of “the many”—who are likely anyway to have markedly conflicting interests? What protection is there for “the many” if the executive power reverts to the “bad” people? And why should we suppose that this powerful executive state is truly wise and virtuous, not made up of the kinds of flawed human beings who usually turn up in positions of authority? As Oakeshott wryly observes in the essay “On Being Conservative,” it is “beyond human experience to suppose that those who rule are endowed with a superior wisdom which discloses to them a better range of beliefs and activities and which gives them authority to impose upon their subjects a quite different manner of life.” And, he remarks, “we tolerate monomaniacs, it is our habit to do so; but why should we be *ruled* by them?”⁵²

A more traditional, sober—and still Catholic—view of politics maintains that political authority “is justified only insofar as it serves [the common good]” and is “inherently instrumental and limited.” Its aim, writes Melissa Moschella, is “to promote the good of the individuals and communities that make up society *indirectly*, by creating the conditions within which they can freely pursue their own goods.” In this familiar notion of subsidiarity, “political society is a society of societies, which must respect the integrity and authority of the smaller societies (families, churches, businesses, civic associations) that compose it.” Political authority must remain limited because many goods “such as friendship, integrity, and religion can only be achieved by freely directing oneself toward them, *and because this freedom is itself a*

⁵⁰ Vermeule, “Integration from Within.”

⁵¹ Vermeule, “Common Good Constitutionalism.”

⁵² Michael Oakeshott, “On Being Conservative,” in *Rationalism in Politics*, 427–28.

crucial condition for human flourishing.” For this reason, Moschella continues, “the natural law account recognizes that liberty is an essential instrumental good that governments must respect precisely because the political common good—which includes the goods of the individuals and smaller communities that make up the political community—cannot be achieved without it.”⁵³

Recall that Oakeshott’s politics of skepticism calls for quasi-judicial government, where substantive purpose is removed as far as possible from government activity. It aims at fostering just the kinds of familial and civic groups that Moschella has described above. The politics of faith, in contrast, requires not only the pursuit of a particular vision of moral virtue but also that government (and therefore governors) should direct its subjects in the paths of virtue. The institutions of government are the “means for arriving at the ‘truth’ . . . and for making the ‘truth’ prevail.”⁵⁴ Yet again, why should ordinary people believe that government, especially a largely unaccountable bureaucracy, will be in any position to take on such questions of substantive purpose and truth for individuals?

Integralism’s answer depends upon assumptions of inferiority and inequality among those who are ruled. Given the declinist moral catastrophizing that stands in the background, integralists see their political prescriptions as a kind of therapy for illness. It is worth quoting Oakeshott in full on this point. He does not have integralism in mind, of course, but he is most definitely describing the politics of faith more generally:

Where it has been believed that the most important characteristic of human beings is that they are alike victims of an identifiable disease and that this derangement, so far from being of cosmic significance, is a historic morbid condition which they have brought upon themselves, and where this has been joined with the belief that the “common good” may be identified as the recovery of sanity . . . and that cure is within human capacity, then the way is open for the recognition of a state as a contingent association of sufferers, for attributing to the *government of a state a prophylactic and a therapeutic office*, and for identifying “politics” with the promotion of this reading of the human condition.⁵⁵

⁵³ Melissa Moschella, “Natural Law, the Common Good, and Limited Government: Friends, Not Foes,” Public Discourse, April 10, 2022, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2022/08/83850/> (italics mine).

⁵⁴ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 27.

⁵⁵ Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 309 (emphasis mine).

On this reading, power—even great power—is required for effective government. Skepticism and restraint are impediments to success. Ambition is prized, not shunned; and restraint is cowardice. Those who disagree with the integralist view are accused of lacking “political imagination.”⁵⁶

Conclusion

I have argued that contemporary integralism is a vivid example of the politics of faith. As John Grove has also observed, Oakeshott’s ideal types of faith and skepticism capture our contemporary situation better than do the contemporary terms “conservative,” “liberal,” and “progressive” because all these terms are presently in flux. Not in flux, however, are certain human inclinations which show up consistently across time and across the political spectrum.

Perhaps the most natural of all political inclinations is the belief that, “if only I were put in charge,” then things would go well and public virtue would increase. Hans Urs von Balthasar observes this candidly in reflecting on integralism: “Who among us has never succumbed to the temptation to enforce spiritual matters by worldly means?”⁵⁷ Progressives want to ban gas stoves and gasoline engines; integralists abortion and gay marriage. I do not mean to say that the bans are equivalent in importance or that these things are exactly “spiritual” matters; but both emerge from positions of complete moral confidence paired with strong desires for enforcement power. We might ask both groups, as Oakeshott does, “what am I so certain about that I would direct all the energy and activity of mankind to attaining?”⁵⁸

One of Oakeshott’s most vivid political images is the Tower of Babel, which he uses as the title of two separate essays. In the first of these, he describes a morality of self-conscious ideals that is opposed to the more natural, organic morality that may grow up over time among a people. He argues that such self-conscious morality is brittle, prone to breakage, and less resilient. It is apt to be imposed from above by people who see themselves in the vanguard of moral change. It is the kind of morality that directs the politics of faith.

Contemporary American integralism demonstrates not only faith in government to advance moral goals but also a worldly *Christian* faith (contradictory as that may seem) that prizes temporal, political victory in

⁵⁶ See Vermeule, “It Can’t Happen.”

⁵⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Integralismus” (1963), trans. Charles Hughes Huff and Anne Carpenter, theologyandsociety.com/integralismus/.

⁵⁸ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 76.

the guise of religion. To put it pointedly, integralists appear to be motivated by a love of power, not by humility. For as Balthasar explains in his astute criticism of integralism, the movement

strives by all means, visible and hidden, public and secret, *first* to gain political and social power for the church, and then to proclaim the Sermon on the Mount and Golgotha from this secured citadel and pulpit. This seemingly purely tactical “first” inherently contains, consciously or unconsciously, a higher value. The end value, for whose sake first and foremost the money, earthly power, and organization is collected, hoarded, and launched, inevitably gets caught in the tow of the putative value of the means, if the end value is just the humiliated lamb, the crucified love.⁵⁹

Integralists have little patience for the gentle skepticism that might inform a very different kind of Christian faith—one that faces the mystery of existence and is informed by John Keats’s “negative capability,” that ability to exist in the midst of “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”⁶⁰

Yet at least one aspect of “the politics of skepticism” must be admitted as deficient, at least if we are seeking solutions for contemporary political problems. Skeptical politics, by definition, are *not* aimed at problem-solving. They focus on maintenance and incremental reform. And, although I have criticized integralism for its one-sidedness in diagnosing the overall condition of our culture, integralists are not wrong that there are many serious political and social problems in contemporary America. One wonders whether the restraint and respect for others required by skeptical politics—toward political allies and enemies alike—is feasible in a polarized situation like our own. This indeed is precisely integralism’s critique of traditional conservatives: in abiding by the rules of civilized society, we have ceded the battle to those who are willing to be warriors. Why not be warriors in turn, and vanquish the enemy once and for all?

Even if we are inclined toward Oakeshott’s skeptical politics, as I am, we might nevertheless wonder whether this vision has any real purchase in the present day. After all, the politics of faith “was the dominant style of politics when Oakeshott was writing, and it remains so today.”⁶¹ Skepticism calls

⁵⁹ Balthasar, “Integralismus.”

⁶⁰ John Keats, “Letter to his Brothers” (1817), mason.gmu.edu/~rnanian/Keats-Negative-Capability.html.

⁶¹ Grove, “Postliberal Politics of Faith,” 136.

for self-restraint, respect for others, and moderation in our expectations of worldly success. Skeptical politics demands “neither love nor gratitude but only respect,” and thus it likely “will receive indifference or even contempt.” The judicial, not executive, character of skepticism will be perceived as a “hindrance.”⁶² It gives no mandate for aggressive, reforming action; it spawns no movements; it is unexciting by design. These are its permanent defects and virtues.

The defects of skeptical politics account for the tremendous appeal of integralism, particularly for the young men who embrace it. These youthful religious traditionalists are full of spirit and energy, unafraid of combat, and eager to take strong stances against what they (often rightly) perceive as the degeneration of American culture. Integralism offers them the opportunity to be part of a countermovement. Skepticism makes no such offer. It will frustrate those “who have a favourite project to promote or impose.”⁶³

Still, I think the survival of this understanding of politics offers hope to those of us who wish to offset the grand dreams of enthusiastic reformers by more modest, but more possible, changes. Oakeshott’s politics of skepticism offers a vital reminder that political activity does not constitute all of life, and certainly not the most important part. It reminds us that our inheritance is always full of advances and declines, things to celebrate and lament in turn, and that no simple story should satisfy us. It also cautions us against investing too much of ourselves in worldly, political affairs, when the most important things lie elsewhere.

Whether we are going to be destroyed by political enemies or by an atomic bomb, let those things—when and if they come—“find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.”⁶⁴ This is a permanent insight that constantly needs restating. N.V

⁶² Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 109.

⁶³ Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 33.

⁶⁴ C. S. Lewis, “On Living in an Atomic Age” (1948), in *Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 91–102.