



The Neo-Catholics: Implementing Christian Nationalism in America

Betty Clermont

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The first neoconservatives—Irving Kristol, Allan Bloom, and Francis Fukuyama—were proponents of the philosopher Leo Strauss, an émigré from Nazi Germany. Strauss considered the ideal state as one ruled by an intellectual elite with religion used to mollify and control the masses. The Roman Catholic Church already had centuries of experience preaching docility of the population to civil leaders willing to support the Church’s preeminent position in society. They were natural partners, albeit with differing pet interests. Applying this concept in the US, however, had its difficulties. While Catholics were the largest single denomination, they did not constitute a majority. In order to establish a “national christianity”—the union of church and state, of naturally conservative fundamentalists and evangelicals, was numerically necessary in order to form the “religious right.” Paul Weyrich, once referred to as the most powerful man in America, and fellow Catholics Terry Dolan and Richard Viguerie, along with Howard Phillips, a Jew who had converted to evangelical Christianity, established the Moral Majority, to be led by televangelist Jerry Falwell, to energize their Christian base into political activism and get out the vote. Weyrich, along with Catholic Edwin J. Feulner Jr., also founded the Heritage Foundation, the prototype of the right-wing think tank, to produce intellectual propaganda for the movement. Funding to pay religious leaders along with think tanks, journals and media outlets, came through Knights of Malta William Simon, Nixon’s Treasury Secretary, and William Casey, Reagan’s CIA Director. The Knights were members of a clandestine international group who, along with the CIA, perpetrated acts of terrorism and the overthrow of legitimate governments justified as defense against the Soviet Union and Red China but, in fact, protected their own wealth and power. Opus Dei-backed Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI lent moral authority to neo-conservative mendacity, and by new appointments, filled the ranks with like-minded prelates. Neo-Catholic journalists Michael Novak, Fr. John Richard Neuhaus and George Weigel rationalized immoral projects with religious rectitude. Their vocabulary and formulations were amplified through the neo-con network and repeated by other religious leaders and politicians. It would change not just the face of American Catholicism, but the face of social policy in the United States as it exists to this day.

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