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The Cold War Romance of Religious Authenticity: Will Herberg, William F. Buckley Jr., and the Rise of the New Right

K. Healan Gaston

Historians remember Will Herberg's 1955 book *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* as a classic expression of American pluralism. The most influential work of its generation on American religion, it is widely viewed as a landmark in the evolution of an atmosphere of tolerance and inclusion in postwar America. Yet Herberg's book also advanced his long-running campaign to define Jewish identity in narrowly religious terms and to naturalize a tightly circumscribed, theologically grounded version of the Judeo-Christian tradition as the prerequisite for American democracy. Relative to many other postwar interpreters of American identity, Herberg was indeed a pluralist and a prophet of inclusion, but a close examination of his classic text and other writings from the late 1930s through the 1960s reveals a more exclusive edge to Herberg's thought. He sought to make a place for Jews at the American table in the context of a Judeo-Christian alliance against the corrosive naturalism he detected at the heart of both communism and secular liberalism.¹

Herberg came under the influence of the neo-orthodox Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr as he abandoned his Marxist convictions on the eve of World War II, but in the 1950s his staunch anticommunism and burgeoning conservatism drove him into the arms of the New Right architect William F. Buckley Jr. Herberg did not formally ally himself with Buckley until several years after *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* appeared, but his work has more in common with Buckley's 1951 antiseccular polemic, *God and Man at Yale*, than historians have recognized. (Although neoconservatives such as David G. Dalin have long claimed Herberg as an ancestor, he also influenced the earlier generation of "paleoconservatives," led by Buckley.) By tracing Herberg's drift to the right and highlighting his involvement with the fiercely anticommunist and antiseccularist Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order (FRASCO) and his close relationship with

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¹ Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, 1955). For a typical interpretation of the book as an expression of liberal pluralism, see William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven, 2003), 201–4.

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Buckley, this essay argues that Herberg used the new concept of a Judeo-Christian tradition to incorporate religious Jews into the social mainstream and to marginalize secular-minded Americans, regardless of their religious or ethnic ancestry. An adequate understanding of Herberg's role in American history requires attention to the deeply antisecularist strain in his work.²

The central claims of *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* are familiar to students of modern American religion. As evidence of "the extraordinary pervasiveness of religious identification" in 1950s America, Herberg cited steady increases in church membership, attendance, and construction, along with a growing reverence for religion among ordinary citizens and intellectuals. Yet he lamented that, despite Americans' growing religiousness, they continued to "think, feel, and act in terms quite obviously secularist." Exploring this paradox of "pervasive secularism amid mounting religiosity," Herberg traced the postwar religious revival to the immigrant experience, thereby locating religion at the heart of American identity. He borrowed the sociologist Marcus Lee Hansen's theory that third-generation immigrants sought to recapture the ethnic traditions that their parents had tried to forget. Yet Herberg, who deemed ethnic particularism "out of line with the logic of American reality," modified Hansen's thesis by insisting that the third generation gravitated to religious traditions rather than ethnic traits. Fusing this claim with Israel Zangwill's classic image, Herberg characterized the United States as a "triple melting pot." Rather than converging on a single culture, Herberg argued, newcomers became American Protestants, Catholics, or Jews as they lost their ethnic identities. This interpretation challenged the equation of Americanization with Protestantization and made religion appear uniquely impervious to the acids of assimilation. Herberg naturalized a tripartite model of national identity by declaring that the "primordial conditions" of American life had always favored a system of religious pluralism where Protestants, Catholics, and Jews became Americans within the boundaries of their respective religious traditions.³

As many critics have noted, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* rested on shaky empirical ground. Herberg's assertion that the third generation returned to religious identities purged of ethnic particularisms rather than to the narrower ethnoreligious affiliations of their grandparents failed utterly. Catholics had not fallen away from religion in the second generation. Few Protestants were recent immigrants. And the resurgence of Jewish identity after World War II was largely driven by ethnicity rather than religion. These deficiencies, coupled with Herberg's fabrication of all of his academic credentials beyond high school,

² William F. Buckley Jr., *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of Academic Freedom* (Chicago, 1951). David G. Dalin, "Will Herberg in Retrospect," *Commentary*, 86 (July 1988), 38–43.

³ On the links between American religious history and political history, see Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton, 1988); and Jon Butler, "Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History," *Journal of American History*, 90 (March 2004), 1357–78. On midcentury conflicts over the cultural foundations of democracy, see Edward A. Purcell Jr., *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value* (Lexington, Ky., 1973); Philip Gleason, "Pluralism, Democracy, and Catholicism in the Era of World War II," *Review of Politics*, 49 (Spring 1987), 208–30; David A. Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Intellectual History* (Princeton, 1996), 155–74; John T. McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928–1960," *Journal of American History*, 84 (June 1997), 97–131; and John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York, 2003). Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 46, 3, 209, 23, 7, 85. On Marcus Lee Hansen's and Will Herberg's modifications of the melting pot image, see Russell A. Kazal, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," *American Historical Review*, 100 (April 1995), 448–50; and Philip Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity: Language and Ethnicity in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore, 1992), 231–49. For Israel Zangwill's original formulation of the melting pot image, see Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot: A Drama in Four Acts* (New York, 1909).

suggest that we should read *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* as a work of cultural criticism—perhaps even an interpretive fiction—rather than a sociological analysis. The book positioned Catholics and practicing Jews within the religious mainstream but simultaneously urged liberal Protestants and secular Jews to rethink their embrace of strict church-state separation. Herberg intervened powerfully in the religious and political debates of the 1950s, advancing a highly constrained definition of pluralism and a controversial political-theological project for American Jews. Although his idealized America was substantially more diverse than the America envisaged by the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s or Father Charles Coughlin in the 1930s, Herberg's vision of pluralism was quite narrow and diverged markedly from the beliefs of most of his coreligionists.⁴

Herberg's strident antisecularism went hand in hand with his conviction that American democracy rested on Judeo-Christian foundations. "A Protestant by theological inclination, a Catholic by temperament, and a Russian Jew by birth" (according to his primary biographer), Herberg worked throughout his life to reconcile wide-ranging and sometimes-conflicting political and theological instincts. His personal search for authenticity attuned him to the potency in Cold War America of the charge that those who advocated a strict reading of church-state separation—both believers and nonbelievers—threatened democracy by promoting the secularization of American culture. Drawn to Reinhold Niebuhr's scathing indictment of liberal theology and naturalism in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), Herberg attacked secular liberalism with increasing frequency and vehemence after World War II, eventually joining hands with the cadre of conservatives around Buckley's *National Review*. Although most interpreters locate Herberg's turn to political conservatism in the late 1950s and early 1960s, all of the elements of his mature conservatism were clearly discernible by the time his iconic book appeared in 1955.⁵

⁴ Critiques of Herberg's *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* include Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity*, 231–49; Edward Shapiro, "Will Herberg's *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*: A Critique," in *Key Texts in American Jewish Culture*, ed. Jack Kugelmass (New Brunswick, 2003), 258–74; Joel Schwartz, "Reconsiderations: Protestant, Catholic, Jew . . .," *National Affairs*, 155 (Spring 2004), 106–25; Stephen J. Stein, "Some Reflections on Will Herberg's Insights and Oversights," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 23 (Winter 2005), 13–23; and Philip Gleason, "Looking Back at *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*," *ibid.*, 51–64. On Jewish identity as more ethnic than religious, see Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity*, 243–46. On Herberg's fabrication of his academic credentials, see Harry J. Ausmus, *Will Herberg: From Right to Right* (Chapel Hill, 1987), 2–3; Ralph Luker, "Herberg, Will," in *American National Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (10 vols., New York, 1999), X, 634–35; Douglas G. Webb, "From Old Left to New Right," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 9 (Fall 1978), 233–40; and exchange between Lewis S. Feuer and Douglas G. Webb, "Reasoning Together," *ibid.*, 11 (Fall 1980), 262–68. On Herberg's isolation from the wider Jewish community on church-state questions, see Jonathan D. Sarna, "Church-State Dilemmas of American Jews," in *Jews and the American Public Square: Debating Religion and Republic*, ed. Alan Mittleman, Robert Licht, and Jonathan D. Sarna (Lanham, 2002), 47–68; Jack Wertheimer, "The Jewish Debate over State Aid to Religious Schools," *ibid.*, 217–37; David G. Dalin, "Jewish Critics of Strict Separationism," *ibid.*, 291–309; David G. Dalin, ed., *American Jews and the Separationist Faith: The New Debate on Religion in Public Life* (Washington, 1993); and Jonathan D. Sarna and David G. Dalin, eds., *Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience* (Notre Dame, 1997).

⁵ Ausmus, *Will Herberg*, 1. On Herberg's political evolution, see John P. Diggins, *Up from Communism: Conservative Odysseys in American Intellectual History* (New York, 1975), 118–59, 269–302; and Paul Edward Gottfried, *The Search for Historical Meaning: Hegel and the Postwar American Right* (Dekalb, 1986), 34–51. On Herberg's religious and ethnic identity, see David G. Dalin, "Will Herberg's Path from Marxism to Judaism: A Case Study in the Transformation of Jewish Belief," in *The Americanization of the Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen (New York, 1995), 119–32; and June Sochen, "Jewish American Identity: The Views of Horace Kallen and Will Herberg," *Michael*, 15 (Jan. 2000), 181–96. On the charge that strict separationism threatened democracy, see K. Healan Gaston, "Demarcating Democracy: Liberal Catholics, Protestants, and the Discourse of Secularism," in *American Religious Liberalism*, ed. Leigh E. Schmidt and Sally M. Promeey (Bloomington, 2012), 337–58. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York, 1934).

Buckley admired Herberg's antisecularism and his belief that American democracy was built on Judeo-Christian foundations. When Herberg first began mobilizing Judeo-Christian formulations in the early 1940s, he participated in the invention of a tradition that is still widely invoked. Judeo-Christian formulations of American democracy and national identity rose to prominence in American public discourse during the 1930s, in response to the emergence of totalitarian regimes around the globe. The challenges posed to democracy by communism, fascism, and secularism during that period led many to embrace the adjective *Judeo-Christian* as a way to define democracy's inner spirit and distinguish it from totalitarian rivals. At the same time, the idea of America as a Judeo-Christian nation dovetailed nicely with changes in the nation's demography wrought by the industrial revolution, which brought large numbers of Catholic and Jewish immigrants into a country that had long been overwhelmingly Protestant. During World War II, the vision of a Judeo-Christian America also helped naturalize the nation's new role as a world leader and defender of Western civilization.

In a groundbreaking and widely cited 1984 article, the historian Mark Silk argued that America's "Judeo-Christian tradition" emerged as "a common faith for a united democratic front" against fascism during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Silk also detected a degree of terminological imprecision within Judeo-Christian ranks and noted that some prominent religious thinkers proved unwilling to adopt the term. Building on Silk's recognition of the political and theological ambiguity of Judeo-Christian formulations, I have argued that, from their inception in the 1930s, these concepts were arrayed not just against fascism but also against communism and secularism. I have also contended that the literature from the time reveals a spectrum of Judeo-Christian discourse. At one end of that spectrum were what I call "Judeo-Christian pluralists," who viewed religious diversity as positive, stressed tolerance as the centerpiece of democracy, and worried more about the dangers of religious nationalism than secularism. At the other end stood what I refer to as "Judeo-Christian exceptionalists," who endorsed narrower conceptions of America's religious diversity, regarded belief in a Judeo-Christian God as democracy's indispensable foundation, and deemed secularism the greatest threat to democracy in the modern world. As I demonstrate here, Herberg was a quintessential Judeo-Christian exceptionalist and one of that persuasion's most ardent and articulate postwar defenders. His vision of American identity captured the intense fears about religious authenticity and secularization that sustained the Cold War's relentless juxtaposition of democracy with an antireligious enemy denoted by the term *godless Communism*.⁶

⁶ Mark Silk, "Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America," *American Quarterly*, 36 (Spring 1984), 65–85, esp. 67–68. See also Mark Silk, *Spiritual Politics: Religion and America since World War II* (New York, 1988), 40–53. Subsequent interpreters have replicated the contours of Mark Silk's account, elaborating on the various arenas where Judeo-Christian terminology flourished. See Judeo-Christian terminology in the military in Deborah Dash Moore, "Jewish GIs and the Creation of the Judeo-Christian Tradition," *Religion and American Culture*, 8 (Winter 1998), 31–53; and Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004). See Judeo-Christian terminology in a discourse of pluralism in Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 196–204; Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York, 2003), 258–61; and J. Terry Todd, "The Temple of Religion and the Politics of Religious Pluralism: Judeo-Christian America at the 1939–1940 New York World's Fair," in *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*, ed. Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen (New York, 2010), 201–22. See Judeo-Christian terminology in interfaith relations in Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 2008), 77–87; and Kevin Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York, 2011), 57–63, 73–80. K. Healan

Quest for Authenticity: Herberg's Intellectual Biography

Herberg's background and earlier writings shed much light on what he hoped to accomplish in *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*. A Russian-born Jew who came to America in 1904 at the age of three, Herberg grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn. Like many eastern European Jewish families, Herberg's was more culturally than religiously Jewish. (Later in his life he kept kosher in his home but does not appear to have attended synagogue regularly.) Soon after leaving City College of New York in 1920, he joined the Communist party, rising quickly through the ranks to become a leader of the Young Workers League of America by the mid-1920s. He followed the anti-Stalinist Lovestoneite faction out of the party in 1929 and thereafter worked alongside Jay Lovestone as the managing editor of the periodical *Workers Age*, giving the faction its theoretical armature until it disbanded in 1941. Herberg also lectured on Marxism at the New Workers School and served as the educational director for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union Local 22 from 1933 to 1954. A restless soul, Herberg tirelessly studied, wrote, and taught, as if trying to earn through nonacademic channels the academic degrees he falsely claimed. (Herberg was dismissed from the City College of New York shortly before completing the program, but he fabricated a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University and sustained the ruse until the mid-1970s, shortly before his death.)⁷

The seeds of Herberg's eventual conservatism could be glimpsed in the late 1930s in his intense dislike of centralized institutions and his emphasis on the cultural dimension of politics. Like many other members of the anti-Stalinist Left, Herberg eschewed the term *communist*, describing his politics as "socialist" or "democratic socialist." Although he retained these labels into the 1950s, he had largely jettisoned Marxism by the early 1940s. During the previous decade Herberg had strongly advocated centralized union control under a democratic federated council, but as the years progressed he grew fearful that excessive centralization in the labor movement—even in the radical unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations—would stifle human freedom and undermine the emancipatory potential of socialism. Like his fellow wavering Marxist James Burnham, Herberg began to regard bureaucratization rather than capitalist profiteering as the central motor of modern history. He found the new term *totalitarianism* useful for highlighting the centralizing and bureaucratizing tendencies in both Stalinism and European fascism. Meanwhile, Herberg's idea of American exceptionalism, based on the Lovestoneite belief that the revolution would occur differently in each national context, sensitized him to the roles of culture and history in social change. Herberg also began to suspect that the tendency toward bureaucratic centralization stemmed from human nature rather than faulty institutional design, such that no purely structural solution could prevent socialism from devolving into totalitarianism. His close reading of Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* in May 1940 reinforced this analysis of bureaucracy. Niebuhr identified the inherent sinfulness of human nature as the reason

Gaston, "The Genesis of America's Judeo-Christian Moment: Secularism, Totalitarianism, and the Redefinition of Democracy" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2008).

⁷ Ausmus, *Will Herberg*, 1–68; Seymour Siegel, "Will Herberg (1902–1977): A Ba'al Teshuvah Who Became Theologian, Sociologist, Teacher," in *American Jewish Year Book, 1978*, ed. Milton Himmelfarb, David Singer, and Morris Fine (New York, 1978), 534; Laura Levitt, "Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism, and Jewish Difference: Revisiting Jewish Secularism," *American Quarterly*, 59 (Sept. 2007), 807–32.

organized groups inevitably broke free of their founding ideals and perpetuated their own survival at any cost. After reading the book, Herberg described his alternative to a bureaucratized “totalitarian socialism” as a “socialist Jeffersonianism,” grounded in a “humanistic conception of society” and aiming at “spiritual individualism and independence.” Herberg’s call for a “new pluralism” or “neo-liberalism” in the summer of 1940 marked a decisive step away from Marxism and toward his later conservatism.⁸

Six months later, in December 1940, Herberg put down his prolific pen. During the next two years, he read widely, took classes at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and began a dialog with Niebuhr that continued into the late 1950s. Herberg even considered converting to Catholicism—a faith he had labeled “the mother of totalitarianism” as late as the summer of 1940—but Niebuhr encouraged him to turn to Judaism instead. When Herberg finally began writing again in the spring of 1943 he identified the “Judeo-Christian tradition” as the wellspring of whatever power the socialists’ secularized religion held, and he saw naturalism or secularism as the source of its weaknesses. He deemed a naturalistic socialism incapable of inspiring “certainty and fervor of faith” because it rested on the unstable foundation of “matter-of-fact reality” and lacked a “vision of ultimates” beyond the “poor, bare facts.” Although Herberg continued to call himself a socialist for more than a decade after 1943, his reduction of political ideologies to theological systems was essentially complete.⁹

Herberg gradually drew out the political implications of his Judeo-Christian critique of Marxism during the 1940s. He began with the problem of centralization in the labor unions, reasoning that only a “profound transformation in the moral atmosphere,” grounded in the cultural resources of the Judeo-Christian tradition, could combat the bureaucratizing force of “the human lust for power.” He then expanded his analysis to include national politics—and New Deal liberals. He saw in the New Deal’s bureaucratic tendencies evidence that the “totalitarian” essence of modern liberalism was eroding democracy, just as bureaucratization had undermined socialism. As early as 1945, Herberg identified liberals as the “special victims and carriers of the disease” of totalitarianism in the United States. He called them “volunteer apologists for totalitarian Russia” and its core tenet of “government control in every sphere.” In his rendering, liberals had warped the concept of democracy beyond recognition, equating it with “the mass-state, a ruthless uniformitarianism, [and] the exaltation of the collectivity,” all justified in the name of “the deified People.” No individual or group, he said, could assert rights against the modern liberal state, which aggressively stamped out all nonstate organizations and “minorities.”¹⁰

In sharp contrast to this conception of democracy, Herberg’s “pluralistic and libertarian” socialism featured a strictly limited state. He expanded on the socialist theorist Lewis Corey’s vision of a mixed public-private economy that featured enterprises of many kinds and sizes, arguing for the same pattern of decentralized, pluralistic authority in the cultural

⁸ Ausmus, *Will Herberg*, 54–70. On the similarities between James Burnham and Herberg, see Diggins, *Up from Communism*. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*; Will Herberg, “Socialist Fundamentals Reexamined: Basic Dilemma of Socialism,” *Workers Age*, June 8, 1940, p. 4; *ibid.*, June 15, 1940, p. 4; *ibid.*, June 22, 1940, p. 3.

⁹ Ausmus, *Will Herberg*, 78; Will Herberg, “The Inquisition Lifts Its Head in America,” *Workers Age*, May 4, 1940, p. 3; Will Herberg, “The Christian Mythology of Socialism,” *Antioch Review*, 3 (March 1943), 125, 130, 132.

¹⁰ Will Herberg, “Bureaucracy and Democracy in Labor Unions,” *Antioch Review*, 3 (Sept. 1943), 417; Will Herberg, “Semantic Corruption,” *New Europe*, 5 (July–Aug. 1945), 10; Will Herberg, “Crucial Question—Collectivism: Totalitarian or Democratic?,” *Commonweal*, Feb. 22, 1946, pp. 475–76.

sphere. He feared that the New Deal state would gain control over the religious and educational institutions needed to check its grasping tendencies. Stressing private initiative in the economic and cultural realms, Herberg defined pluralism as “a balanced combination of state action, on the one hand, and corporative and individual action, on the other, *with the presumption always in favor of the latter.*” He insisted that “whenever individual or voluntary group effort can accomplish the purpose, the state is to keep out,” and he described his “democratic collectivism” as a version of the “Anglo-American liberal tradition” that emphasized “personal and minority rights” and “individuality, self-help, and voluntary group effort.”¹¹

Summing up his new conception of democratic socialism as an extension of classical liberalism, Herberg rooted this view, philosophically and historically, in Judeo-Christian faith. He drew on Niebuhr’s concepts of “prophetic faith” and “biblical realism” to define democracy as “*the institutionalization of permanent resistance to human sinfulness in politics.*” Herberg then traced the limited-power state to the Calvinism of the Puritans, the source of the Founding Fathers’ “somber theological realism.” According to Herberg, even the decidedly heterodox Thomas Jefferson had shared this realism and the underlying belief in original sin, despite his deism. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, Herberg sought to ground democracy in an “ultimate” or “total commitment” capable of “protect[ing] it from inner corruption as well as from external attack.” He believed that only “prophetic religion” could serve this function, preserving democracy by revealing “that nothing in this world is absolute and worthy of worship, that everything stands under the judgment of a holy God.”¹²

Herberg also took inspiration from the Christian personalists Jacques Maritain and Nicolas Berdyaev. As Herberg explained, these thinkers emphasized the God-given nature of human dignity, identifying persons as the only legitimate “ends in themselves” and all else—“social institutions, society, and the state”—as mere supports of human dignity. Personalism reinforced Herberg’s premise that only God—not the state—could grant rights to individuals. The personalist outlook suggested that democracy could not be sustained apart from prophetic faith, which powerfully checked the state by reminding citizens of their ultimate loyalty to God as the author of their rights and the judge of their sinful pretensions to autonomy. In Herberg’s view, what he called “secularism” failed because it portrayed man as “the supreme power in the universe, entirely sufficient unto himself.” Herberg identified secularism—the common intellectual denominator between Marxism and a debased modern liberalism—as the spiritual source of totalitarianism. Adopting a historical account common among Catholics, Herberg traced the origin of totalitarianism to the “disintegration of the medieval social order,” wherein a “pluralistic corporatism” had given way to the “absolute unitary state” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the “popular absolutism and modern mass-democracy” of the eighteenth century. He also advanced a theory of secularist false consciousness, explaining that although many secular and religious liberals were democrats, “their democratic and humanist convictions are the fruit not of their secularist philosophy but of the religious tradition, whose

¹¹ Lewis Corey, *The Unfinished Task: Economic Reconstruction for Democracy* (New York, 1942); Herberg, “Crucial Question,” 475. Emphasis in original.

¹² Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York, 1935); Will Herberg, “Democracy and the Nature of Man,” *Christianity and Society*, 11 (Fall 1946), 12, 19, 18. Emphasis in original. Will Herberg, “Prophetic Faith in an Age of Crisis,” *Judaism*, 1 (July 1952), 199.

moral values they have absorbed but whose spiritual foundations, which alone can give power and meaning to these values they have rejected." Secular and religious liberals, he argued, naturally exalted "the 'social-welfare state' as an omniscient agency for the total control of social life." In his mind, this stance portended a reprisal of the "revolutionary terror" of the French and Russian Revolutions. The slippery slope might begin with welfare liberalism, he wrote, but it always ended in totalitarianism—the pure political manifestation of a secular world view. Like many of the other Cold War intellectuals who viewed democracy's clash with "godless Communism" as a spiritual struggle, Herberg contended that democracy could be understood only in explicitly Judeo-Christian terms.¹³

Despite his personalist leanings, Herberg credited Niebuhr rather than Maritain and Berdyaev with spearheading the needed "offensive against religious 'liberalism'" in the name of Judeo-Christian democracy. He agreed with Niebuhr that secular and religious liberalism embodied different degrees of error: although religious liberals favored a secular model of politics that encouraged the growth of a total state, they acknowledged God's existence. Yet secularism had become the "official voice" of American culture, Herberg charged. Theological modernists had transformed their churches and synagogues into "glorified social and adult education centers" while fundamentalists had ceded the public sphere entirely, retreating into cloistered spaces of "legalism or moralism or pietism." True religion, by Herberg's definition, meant "total obedience to God in the *totality* of existence," and it demanded public action as well as private observance. Niebuhr, he said, had done an invaluable service by translating the "pluralism and social relativism" of democracy into Judeo-Christian terms while excising the modern liberals' divinization of humanity and the state.¹⁴

Herberg worked doggedly to turn American Jews away from a secular conception of democracy and toward this distinctly Niebuhrian version. He believed that the Jewish community was strategically important to the democratic project because Jewish identity contained a tension between "the Jew as son of the Covenant and the Jew as natural man and loyal citizen of his secular community." By creating a perennial state of "self-alienation," Herberg wrote, this inner division made the religious Jew an ideal democrat, always on guard against the state's tendency to deify itself. If Jewish self-alienation offered critical distance, however, it also fostered a susceptibility to secularism. Echoing Niebuhr's critique of liberal Protestantism, Herberg blasted contemporary Judaism, decrying "the routine reiteration of inherited formulas, the ostentatious parading of meaningless idealistic platitudes, and the serving up again of the stale commonplaces of yesterday's humanist philosophy." In his view, a "hidden liberalism" infected even Orthodoxy. Lamenting the absence of a "Niebuhr or [Paul] Tillich to 'shake the foundations'" of Judaism, Herberg called for a Jewish theological renaissance akin to Niebuhr's neo-orthodoxy.¹⁵

¹³ Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism* (New York, 1938); Nicolas Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R. M. French (New York, 1944); Will Herberg, "Personalism versus Totalitarianism," *Politics*, 2 (Dec. 1945), 373, 370; Will Herberg, "Faith and Politics: Some Reflections on Whittaker Chambers' *Witness*," *Christianity and Crisis*, Sept. 29, 1952, p. 123; Will Herberg, "The Church and American Politics," *Commentary*, 8 (Aug. 1949), 200; Herberg, "Democracy and the Nature of Man," 16; Herberg, "Faith and Politics," 123; Herberg, "Personalism versus Totalitarianism," 373.

¹⁴ Will Herberg, "Religious Communities in Present-Day America," *Review of Politics*, 16 (April 1954), 173; Will Herberg, "Secularism in Church and Synagogue," *Christianity and Crisis*, May 15, 1950, pp. 58–59. Emphasis in original. Herberg, "Prophetic Faith in an Age of Crisis," 199.

¹⁵ Will Herberg, "Assimilation in Militant Dress: Should the Jews Be 'Like unto the Nations'?", *Commentary*, 4 (July 1947), 21; Herberg, "Secularism in Church and Synagogue," 59–60.

Herberg was particularly dismayed by the tendency of American Jews to affirm their identity in secular terms, via “*ersatz*-Jewish faiths” such as “Jewish nationalism, culture, social service, [and] ‘anti-defamation.’” The authentic Jew, he wrote, was “a man of two souls,” not fully at home “even in Zion.” But individuals and groups sought to “‘normalize’ Jewish life” by wishing away the existential predicament created by the “objective though supernatural fact” of “covenant-existence.” Most frequently, Herberg charged, American Jews fetishized survival by turning the Jewish community itself into a false idol to be defended at any spiritual cost. Thus, he complained, the Reform tradition regarded the Jewish covenant as merely “a ‘creedal union,’ a voluntary association along the lines of a Protestant denomination.” Meanwhile, Reconstructionists and secular Jews adopted ethnic or cultural definitions of Judaism. Finally, Zionism was merely “political nationalism,” the “most radical perversion of the idea of Israel.” The common denominator between these “*ersatz*-Jewish” movements, according to Herberg, was their overriding emphasis on group survival—the same emphasis on institutional self-preservation that he thought plagued Marxist labor unions and secular democracies. Herberg proposed instead an exclusively religious definition of Jewishness, arguing that Jews lived under the covenant whether they liked it or not.¹⁶

Herberg codified his theology in the 1951 book *Judaism and Modern Man*, where he adopted a neo-orthodox and existentialist stance. As many critics noted, however, his interpretation of Judaism had a decidedly Christian cast that blunted the book’s force in Jewish circles. At the same time, Herberg began to craft the less normative, more descriptive strategy of persuasion that he would employ, to far greater effect, in *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*. As one astute reviewer noted, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* portrayed a struggle between an inauthentic revival, in the spirit of Constantine and Eisenhower, and an authentic revival, in the spirit of Augustine and Niebuhr. Even as he urged Americans to embrace prophetic faith, Herberg also insisted that they were *already* doing so, as witnessed by the postwar upsurge of religious belief. The message was clear: If “the American Jew is to regard himself as a Jew, and if he is to be so regarded by his non-Jewish neighbors and friends, some religious association, however vague, is necessary.” The “Jew can integrate himself into American society” only “in terms of a religious community,” Herberg emphasized. He insisted that his substantively religious definition of Judaism meshed perfectly with American social and political conditions, offering the path to assimilation and survival.¹⁷

Protestant-Catholic-Jew merely fleshed out a historical narrative that Herberg pitched repeatedly to Jewish audiences during the Joseph McCarthy years. “There are growing signs,” he wrote in May 1950, “of a reaction against the pervasive secularism of the past century.” If secularism represented “the mark of the modern mind,” he continued, then a “*post-modern*” outlook was emerging. Although the “flattering assurances of the humanist

¹⁶ Herberg, “Secularism in Church and Synagogue,” 59–60. Emphasis in original. Will Herberg, “The Sectarian Conflict over Church and State,” *Commentary*, 14 (Nov. 1952), 457. An abridged version of the article is Will Herberg, “The Sectarian Conflict over Church and State,” *Christianity and Crisis*, Feb. 2, 1953, pp. 3–7. Herberg, “Assimilation in Militant Dress,” 21–22; Will Herberg, “Jewish Existence and Survival: A Theological View,” *Judaism*, 1 (Jan. 1952), 22, 24.

¹⁷ Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man: An Interpretation of Jewish Religion* (New York, 1951). On the reception of Herberg’s theological interpretation, see David G. Dalin, *From Marxism to Judaism: Collected Essays of Will Herberg* (Princeton, 1989), viii–xxi; Robert G. Goldy, *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America* (Bloomington, 1990); and John M. Krumm, review of *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* by Will Herberg, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 11 (May 1956), 64. Will Herberg, “Religious Trends in American Jewry,” *Judaism*, 3 (Summer 1954), 232.

gospel” promised material and spiritual security, he wrote, recent crises had destroyed this false sense of security and cast doubt on science itself, leading Americans toward a more reliable source of insight. Herberg thought younger Jews, especially, were abandoning the long-standing “Jewish-secularist alliance” and embracing his narrowly religious understanding of Judaism. He also believed that, in America, Reform and Orthodox Jews were transcending age-old cultural and ethnic divisions and converging on the middle ground of Conservative Judaism. Herberg contended that even secular Jews, recognizing the “‘survivalist’ utility of Jewish religion,” were tempering their personal skepticism with a “*pro-religious attitude*.” Thus, he declared “militant secularism” almost dead in the Jewish community, as elsewhere. He added hopefully that even the “*ersatz*-Jewish” faiths, shorn of their “total claims,” could lead followers back to the fold.¹⁸

Even so, Herberg insisted that if Jews wanted to reclaim their authentic identity and find social acceptance, they needed to renounce strict church-state separation. Western Jews had long viewed religion as a private matter, believing that a secular politics would free them to practice their faith. Herberg denied that a secular culture treated religions equally, however. Rather, he contended, it enshrined secularism as an official faith and trampled on all religious communities. Strict separation of church and state entailed a “separation of religion from life,” and, he declared pointedly, Jews, least of all, could wish for the further advance of secularism: “The believing Jew will not want to help speed the secularization of American life,” while the “responsible” nonbeliever “will see the folly of giving the impression, particularly at this time, that American Jewry is aligned with the anti-religious, secularizing forces.” Herberg concluded that Jewish survival “is ultimately conceivable only in religious terms,” because “a thoroughly ‘de-religionized’ society would make Jewish existence impossible.” A triumphant, totalitarian secularism would crush Judaism along with democracy.¹⁹

Herberg hammered away at the secular public schools, calling them a powerful threat to democracy and Judaism. He strongly correlated a group’s religious authenticity with its position on church-state separation. He described secular public education as a joint product of a few militant antireligionists and a much larger group of Americans who foolishly believed that religious education by families and churches could make up for “literally godless” schooling. The state, he declared, should provide financial support for religious schools, and he insisted that the Founding Fathers had viewed such promotion of religion as a legitimate state function. Although the First Amendment “definitely prohibits the *establishment* of an official religion,” he wrote, “or government action in any way *favoring* one religious denomination over another,” it hardly banned “aid *on an equal basis* to all religious groups.” In other words, the Constitution favored “the propaganda of theism,” whereas “non- or anti-religion has never enjoyed and does not now enjoy the same public status as religion.” Since the late nineteenth century, Herberg charged, “secularist educators” in universities had imposed the continental European view of public education

¹⁸ Herberg, “Secularism in Church and Synagogue,” 60; Herberg, “Jewish Existence and Survival,” 26. Will Herberg, “The Postwar Revival of the Synagogue,” *Commentary*, 9 (April 1950), 324, 317. Emphasis in original. Herberg, “Religious Trends in American Jewry,” 233. Herberg, “Secularism in Church and Synagogue,” 60. On Herberg’s views of contemporary trends in American Judaism, see Herberg, “Religious Communities in Present-Day America,” 173; Herberg, “Religious Trends in American Jewry”; and Will Herberg, “The Religious Stirrings on the Campus: A Student Generation ‘Accessible to Good,’” *Commentary*, 13 (March 1952), 242–44.

¹⁹ Herberg, “Sectarian Conflict over Church and State,” *Commentary*, 459. Will Herberg, “A Jewish Point of View,” *Religious Education*, 48 (May–June 1953), 139.

as “a ‘natural’ activity of the state designed primarily to inculcate a common doctrine and create a uniform mentality among the citizens,” rather than a mere “device for making up the inadequacies of individual or group effort.” Like continental theorists, he asserted, American educators viewed the churches and other civic institutions as rivals of the state and thus as threats to the nation. Herberg insisted that this continental approach inexorably led to totalitarianism because “the secularist counter-religion of naturalism” filled the void wherever “religion—that is, Jewish-Christian religion—is deliberately excluded from education.” He urged Jews and other Americans to take back their schools from secular educators.²⁰

Herberg identified American Catholics as the staunchest supporters of his position on religion’s public status. To be sure, he discerned an authoritarian tendency in the Church and called on it to “moderate its demands in the field of education, to curb exhibitions of ecclesiastical power in politics,” and generally “to avoid inflaming the non-Catholic mind.” But Herberg saw a growing tolerance of religious pluralism among Catholics, codified in the writings of the Jesuit scholar John Courtney Murray, and he worked to popularize Murray’s Christian defense of religious liberty. Herberg believed that Catholics had much to teach Jews about public education and public culture more generally. Thus, he downplayed his critique of Catholicism when he addressed the largely Jewish readership of *Commentary*, lauding Catholics’ staunch opposition to secularism and support for publicly funded religious education. Herberg declared their approach “thoroughly in line with the best of democratic tradition, which has always tended to check pretensions of the state to a monopoly of social and cultural life.”²¹

If American Catholics, in Herberg’s view, offered Jews a model for thinking about the public role of religion, then American Protestants demonstrated the consequences of failing to heed the danger of secularism. Herberg charged that Protestants had “surrendered intellectual leadership to non-religious forces” by embracing “the primary secularist claim that religion is strictly a ‘private affair’ and that culture and social life are to be built on humanistic foundations.” He blamed Protestants’ strict reading of church-state separation and even their theological liberalism—their reduction of religion to “mere ethical culture”—on a “preoccupation with the Catholic ‘menace.’” And he urged Jews to eschew this “defensive,” anti-Catholic “crusade” for strict religious neutrality. Throughout Herberg’s writings on church-state matters, he denied that strict separationism was defensible on political or theological grounds. Only anti-Catholic bigotry, he believed, could lead liberal Protestants to undermine their own faith by barring religion from schools.²²

Herberg levied the same charge of anti-Catholicism against Jewish supporters of strict separationism. He acknowledged that Jews, having gained their emancipation through the emergence of secular modern societies, naturally feared that religion’s return to public life would produce marginalization or even oppression. But Herberg found this an overly defensive—even bigoted—position, entirely disconnected from the realities of the inclusive

²⁰ On the correlation of a group’s religious authenticity with its position on church-state separation, see Herberg, “Religious Communities in Present-Day America,” 173. Herberg, “Sectarian Conflict over Church and State,” *Commentary*, 456–58, 451, 455, 452, 458, 451, 455–56. Emphasis in original. Herberg, “Jewish Point of View,” 136.

²¹ Herberg, “Sectarian Conflict over Church and State,” *Commentary*, 454, 461, 456. John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York, 1960). On Jewish fears about state aid for religious education, compare Herberg, “Sectarian Conflict over Church and State,” *Commentary*, 460; and Will Herberg, “Anti-Semitism on the Left,” *Commonweal*, Jan. 16, 1953, pp. 371–4.

²² Herberg, “Sectarian Conflict over Church and State,” *Commentary*, 455–56, 451, 454, 453.

American environment and at least implicitly anti-Catholic. He declared that anti-Semitism had “virtually ceased to exist” in modern America, where an individual’s “separateness” as a Jew is no longer regarded as a mark of his foreignness but rather as a sign of his Americanness.” On this basis, Herberg blasted Jews for what he called their fear of religion in general and of Catholicism in particular. He urged them to resist “those who believe that democracy requires the eviction of religion from public life and the thorough secularization of society.” Herberg’s analysis promised Jews that if they simply embraced their faith, properly understood, they could become integral partners in American religious life and attain full social acceptance.²³

The Biblical Basis of Democracy: Herberg and FRASCO

In his most intensive period of work on *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, between the summer of 1954 and the spring of 1955, Herberg actively tried to turn American Jews against strict separationism. He also became involved with FRASCO, created in 1953 by a cadre of Washington, D.C., insiders—most notably the Episcopal clergyman Charles W. Lowry, the prominent Quaker D. Elton Trueblood, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s pastor, the Presbyterian minister Edward L. R. Elson—who sought, with Eisenhower’s support, an interfaith alliance against communism. Like Herberg, these figures were hardly theological conservatives, but in seeking to “unite all believers in God” against an “atheistic Communism which aims to destroy both religion and liberty,” they endorsed the widespread Cold War equation of communism with secularism and democracy with Judeo-Christian religion. Lowry, FRASCO’s spokesman, described democracy as the political application of the “Judeo-Christian religious tradition” and traced communism back to the false religion of secularism, which offered a “scientific, technological, and humanistic answer to all human problems” and “salvation based exclusively on the realities of this world.” FRASCO leaders, like Herberg, argued that effective anticommunism required an explicitly religious defense of democracy and that liberals who resisted this approach could not be trusted as allies. Herberg’s engagement with the group highlighted his distance from the American Jewish mainstream, which remained deeply suspicious of such Christian-led efforts to define American identity in religious terms.²⁴

Herberg presented “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy” at FRASCO’s first annual conference in November 1954. He called democracy the political expression of a set of bedrock biblical claims shared by Jews and Christians, especially “the Prophetic conviction of the sovereignty of God and His continuing judgment upon man and all his works.” Without being grounded in “a majesty beyond itself,” Herberg warned, democracy would

²³ Will Herberg, “Anti-Semitism Today,” *Commonweal*, July 16, 1954, pp. 359, 361. Herberg, “The Sectarian Conflict over Church and State,” 459.

²⁴ Will Herberg to Hershel Matt and Gustine Matt, Aug. 25, 1954, folder 27A, Will Herberg Collection (Drew University Archives, Madison, N.J.). Herberg to June Bingham, April 13, 1955, Will Herberg file, box 26, June Bingham Correspondence, Reinhold Niebuhr Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). “National Conference on the Spiritual Foundations of American Democracy, November 8–10, 1954,” conference program, folder 35, box 10, series 7, Social Action Department Records, National Catholic Welfare Conference—U.S. Catholic Conference Papers (Catholic University of America, Washington). “Highlights, First National Conference on the Spiritual Foundations of Western Democracy,” folder 80, box 1, John Courtney Murray Papers (Georgetown University, Washington). Charles W. Lowry, “Foreword,” in *Conflicting Faiths: Christianity versus Communism*, ed. Charles W. Lowry (Washington, 1953), 3. On the context for the formation of the Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order (FRASCO), see William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960: The Soul of Containment* (New York, 2008), 257–309.

“inevitably exalt itself to supreme majesty” and thereby become despotic. He described the Judeo-Christian tradition as a “built-in principle of self-limitation, self-criticism, and self-reform” that discouraged both religious and secular nationalisms. Biblical faith, Herberg added, also encouraged political realism by foregrounding human sinfulness. He reiterated his claim that the Founders’ vision of a limited-power state, in which no individual enjoyed unchecked authority, stemmed from a biblically derived appreciation of man’s sinful nature and God’s absolute sovereignty.²⁵

Herberg insisted that all secular thinkers, no matter how staunch their anticommunist views, would inevitably turn democracy into a false idol. They could not help but falter in the fight against communism, he insisted, because their “intellectually incoherent” premises undercut democracy itself. “Every attempt to establish an equalitarian ethic in exclusively nonreligious, humanistic terms must fail,” Herberg asserted, “since aside from their God-relationship there is literally nothing in which all men are ‘created equal.’” Secular liberals worried him the most, because their “atomistic individualism” compounded the errors of “secular humanism” by ignoring the “need for community.” He wrote that secular liberalism and totalitarianism, while putatively opposed, actually tended to “nourish and sustain each other,” and concluded that a “self-sufficient, self-divinizing” liberal individualism was just as “demonic and idolatrous” as totalitarian state worship and pointed toward much the same end.²⁶

Although Herberg’s conference paper was received warmly, FRASCO leaders worried about the reticence of official American Jewry. Noting the “presence of so many high-ranking Catholics” at the inaugural conference, they speculated privately that members’ near-unanimous criticism of the “secularization of American life,” the “lack of religious influence in the public schools,” and the “exaggeration of separation between Church and State” explained both Catholic overrepresentation and the dearth of Jews and liberal Protestants. (Jewish delegates were opposed to religion in public education, the report noted.) A less openly discussed reason for the strong Catholic presence was that Lowry, seeking to circumvent the Church’s prohibition of official Catholic involvement in ecumenical ventures, had tailored FRASCO’s name and articles of incorporation to Catholic specifications and given Fr. John F. Cronin of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) veto power over all decisions. Although Cronin’s veto power remained secret, Lowry’s public concessions to Catholic leaders fueled suspicions that both men wielded disproportionate power in FRASCO, leading many Jews and liberal Protestants to doubt the group’s commitment to full inclusion.²⁷

Moreover, many of FRASCO’s leaders treated Judaism as an afterthought, despite their stated aim to build an interfaith alliance against communism. Lowry’s 1952 book *Communism and Christ* acknowledged Judaism as the historical “progenitor of Christianity”

²⁵ “Highlights, First National Conference on the Spiritual Foundations of Western Democracy”; Will Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” *Thought*, 30 (Spring 1955), 38, 39, 42, 46, 48, 50.

²⁶ Herberg, “Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 41, 42, 47, 49. John F. Cronin to Archbishop Patrick A. O’Boyle, Feb. 18, 1955, folder 14, box 10, series 7, Social Action Department Records, National Catholic Welfare Conference—United States Catholic Conference Papers. On John F. Cronin’s role in FRASCO, see John T. Donovan, *Crusader in the Cold War: A Biography of Fr. John F. Cronin, S.S. (1908–1994)* (New York, 2005), 81–86.

²⁷ “Report on the National Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order,” folder 13, box 10, series 7, Social Action Department Records, National Catholic Welfare Conference—United States Catholic Conference Papers; “Memorandum on Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order,” Oct. 25, 1954, folder 11, *ibid.*; John F. Cronin, “Report on the Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order,” folder 16, *ibid.*



This photo of Will Herberg was taken at the summer home of the famed sociologist Daniel Bell in 1954. During the same year Herberg addressed the Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order and engaged in the most intensive period of work on *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, which appeared to much acclaim in 1955. *Courtesy Special Collections and Archives, Drew University Library.*

but quickly dismissed it as “a particularized religion, linked with a single race and tradition, without the potential creativity and universal appeal of Christianity.” In a memo to his superiors that recounted FRASCO’s genesis, Cronin said that Lowry had sought “the aid of American Catholics in a common struggle to protect the foundations of our Christian civilization.” FRASCO’s few Jewish members did manage to ensure that the group’s statement of purpose rejected “all forms of totalitarianism,” a phrase that implicitly included fascism—often justified in Christian terms—rather than explicitly singling out atheistic communism. These Jewish figures worried that a religiously defined American anticommunism might take on a repressive form. Yet their linguistic victory proved ephemeral, as FRASCO’s non-Jewish leaders persisted in identifying “Communism and secularism” as the primary threats. Ultimately, FRASCO sought an openly if broadly theistic political community—one

in which Jews and liberal Protestants, maligned as secularists during the 1950s, would have felt distinctly uncomfortable.²⁸

FRASCO's membership rules, along with public statements by its leaders, linked anti-communism to support for this theistic vision of democracy. Cronin used his veto power to restrict membership to those defining communism as "atheistic and diabolical"—meaning those "who believed in God and who practiced their religious faith." In the "offensive to capture men's minds," Cronin feared that those who resisted communism on merely economic or political grounds would prove unreliable allies. He worried especially about religious and secular liberals, who "share somewhat the mentality of the Socialist and similar parties of Europe" and who might prove "too ready for a compromise." Cronin portrayed FRASCO as fighting not just communism abroad but also secularism at home by promoting public confidence in "religious truth as the prime support of human freedom." Similarly, FRASCO's articles of incorporation pledged the organization to resist all domestic activities "which may tend to destroy confidence in religion"—a category that for many members included secular public education. For his part, Lowry, in a 1955 letter to the *Christian Century*, ascribed to Protestants "a secularistic interpretation of the First Amendment" and charged that "Catholics often seem to be the only Christians who value the religious foundations of American education and government." Like Herberg, FRASCO's leaders portrayed strict separationists as religiously inauthentic and as enemies of religion and democracy, despite their stated intentions.²⁹

Archival evidence reveals a sharp divergence between Catholic and Jewish responses to FRASCO. On the Catholic side, Church leaders harbored doubts about Lowry's judgment and his larger political aims, but they displayed a genuine enthusiasm for FRASCO. Several weeks after the inaugural conference, Cronin and Monsignor George G. Higgins of the NCWC met with Fr. John Courtney Murray and Fr. Gustave A. Weigel to discuss the event. All four men deemed the conference "an impressive success" from "a Church point of view." They noted especially that FRASCO's aims dovetailed with three core Catholic positions: anticommunism, the idea that "democracy has a spiritual basis," and the view that "education should be religious." Murray proposed that the group should sponsor panels of antisecularist speakers in universities, which he termed the very "citadels of secularism." The four further agreed that Cronin should continue to serve as a liaison between Catholic leaders and FRASCO, ensuring that the group sustained "a sound anti-communist program" and "a sound idea of democracy." They also stipulated that FRASCO should avoid the simplistic, characteristically Protestant view "that faith in God would solve all problems" without rational and empirical knowledge. And they emphasized that FRASCO should avoid any taint of theological ecumenism, sticking to civil cooperation. They favored limiting the group to "Protestants and Jews who will go along with our approach, rather than risking incidents by broadening the base too much."³⁰

²⁸ Charles W. Lowry, *Communism and Christ* (New York, 1953), 91; "Memorandum on Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order"; Cronin to O'Boyle, Nov. 22, 24, 1954, folder 14, box 10, series 7, Social Action Department Records, National Catholic Welfare Conference–United States Catholic Conference Papers; Cronin, "Report on the National Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order."

²⁹ "Memorandum on Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order"; Charles W. Lowry to *Christian Century*, Dec. 24, 1955, folder 8, box 10, series 7, Social Action Department Records, National Catholic Welfare Conference–United States Catholic Conference Papers.

³⁰ "Report on Conversations, Woodstock, Nov. 27, 1954," folder 11, box 10, series 7, Social Action Department Records, National Catholic Welfare Conference–United States Catholic Conference Papers. On ties between FRASCO and the Central Intelligence Agency, see Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 280–81.

By contrast, many Jewish participants viewed FRASCO with alarm. Rabbi Eugene Lipman attended the first meeting to gather information for Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (the umbrella organization for Reform Judaism). His confidential memorandum to Eisendrath and other leaders (including Rabbi Jay Kaufman of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; I. Cyrus Gordon and Albert Vorspan of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism; and Jules Cohen of the National Community Relations Advisory Council) expressed deep misgivings about FRASCO in general and Herberg in particular. According to Lipman, only a handful of Jewish leaders attended FRASCO's first meeting: Herberg, Rabbi Norman Gerstenfeld (the Jewish member of FRASCO's planning committee), Rabbi Edgar Magnin, Joshua Goldberg, S. Andhil Fineberg, Isaac Frank, and Lipman (as a member of the National Community Relations Advisory Council). FRASCO's letterhead listed Gerstenfeld, Magnin, and Maxwell Abbell, a wealthy businessman and philanthropist who did not attend the inaugural conference. Lipman deplored the group's dogged emphasis on "the need for absolute spiritual values" and sarcastically identified Herberg as "the star of the sessions." Herberg, he reported, was "clever, quick, and delighted all the Catholic[s] and Protestants present. He should have," Lipman added, for "he spoke in their terms and presented their philosophy." Though Herberg claimed the mantle of Judaism, the memo continued, he "expounded a clear combination of existential thinking and Barthian-Niebuhrian neo-orthodoxy." Throughout the note, Lipman questioned Herberg's theological agenda and religious loyalties. "This is Judaism?" he wrote incredulously.³¹

Lipman described FRASCO as a heavily Catholic initiative, noting that "Catholic sources" contributed much of the funding and the "hierarchy and laity" figured prominently at the conference. He charged that FRASCO's Protestant and Jewish members would do virtually anything to keep the Catholics on board. Lipman recounted a private conversation wherein Gerstenfeld squelched Lipman's proposal to create a commission within FRASCO to investigate security hearings and other domestic violations of civil liberties. Gerstenfeld supported the idea in principle, Lipman explained, but feared the reaction of Catholic participants. Lipman believed that the group's pro-Catholic orientation accounted for the presence of Herberg, whom Gerstenfeld had not chosen, and was the reason why "none of the Jews present arose to dispute with Herberg—or to say anything at all in any session, as a matter of fact." Under-scoring that the "total recognizable Jewish attendance was very small," Lipman declared that FRASCO's Jewish leaders were "neither representative nor strong either in the Jewish or general communities," being willing "to kow-tow completely to the Christian groups."³²

To supplement his own impressions, Lipman asked Albert Vorspan to solicit reflections on the conference from another attendee, the Protestant C. Arild Olsen of the National Council of Churches. Olsen noted that "(1) Catholic representation was powerful and official; Protestant and Jewish neither. (2) No interest in the threats to individual freedom involved in wrong approaches to fighting Communism. (3) Preoccupation with religion in the schools. . . . (4) Deeply conservative approach." Summing up, Lipman called FRASCO "so absolute, so anti-liberal, so rooted in the idea of total dichotomy between the free world and the Communist world, that it is almost frightening." He could see no point in cooperating with a group that viewed the Cold War as a "struggle

³¹ Rabbi Eugene J. Lipman, "Memorandum," Nov. 10, 1954, folder 6, box 10, Abraham J. Feldman Papers (Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio).

³² *Ibid.*

for men's minds and souls" and the public schools as a tool for teaching "the richness and sacredness of our heritage under God." Lipman suggested alerting the National Community Relations Advisory Council, which could then dissuade Jews from joining FRASCO; another Jewish writer warned that FRASCO would "bear watching by democratically oriented religious and community organizations."³³

Although Herberg could not have known the degree of skepticism that his involvement with FRASCO elicited among Jewish leaders, he recognized the obstacles to Jewish participation in the group. He knew that FRASCO could not bring American Jews to the table merely by citing "totalitarianism" in its statement of purpose. As a small minority in an overwhelmingly Christian population, they feared religious boundary-drawing exercises, even when the boundary in question appeared to include them. Moreover, by excluding secular thinkers, FRASCO forced religious Jews to choose sides between their nonbelieving Jewish counterparts and Protestant and Catholic anticommunists. Even so, Herberg believed he could circumvent the impasse. In April 1955, just as he finished *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, Herberg unveiled his strategy in an article urging American Jews to embrace FRASCO's explicitly Judeo-Christian anticommunism.³⁴

Herberg again leveled the charge of anti-Catholicism against American Jews. Although he admitted that much Catholic anticommunism had been "crude and uncritical," Herberg nevertheless lauded Catholics' "unequivocal and effective opposition to Communism." He presented Catholic anticommunism as a middle way between the conservatives' simple equation of God's will with the national interest and the liberals' single-minded obsession with "the 'Red-baiting' and 'witch-hunting' presumed to be devastating our civil liberties." Liberal Protestants and Jews, Herberg charged, had not taken up anticommunism in a manner commensurate with their vocal condemnation of right-wing movements. He suggested that a deep-seated anti-Catholicism had quickened their opposition to fascism in the 1930s but now blunted their "witness" against communism, the sworn enemy of Catholicism. The self-styled defenders of tolerance, he believed, had fallen into the trap of bigotry.³⁵

But Herberg seems to have recognized that accusing Jews of being anti-Catholic would not suffice to bring Jews into FRASCO. The organization would need to abandon its theological test for membership. Herberg openly challenged FRASCO's use of belief in God as the standard for "separat[ing] the sheep from the goats" among anticommunists, and he proposed an exclusively political criterion for inclusion. Yet Herberg's standard was functionally indistinguishable from that employed by FRASCO's leaders. He recommended including everyone committed to "a democracy that refuses to absolutize itself, as it refuses to absolutize any idea, institution, or 'ism'—to a democracy, in short, that explicitly or implicitly recognizes a majesty beyond itself." This amounted to a distinction without a difference, as Herberg had consistently maintained that the only "majesty" beyond democracy was God and the only resource capable of checking democracy was the authentic Judeo-Christian faith. Herberg's test would have excluded the very same religious liberals and secularists from FRASCO, albeit on slightly different grounds.³⁶

³³ *Ibid.* Judah Raby [Eugene J. Lipman], "Interfaith—On What Terms?," *Congress Weekly*, Dec. 13, 1954, pp. 6–7.

³⁴ Will Herberg, "Communism, Democracy, and the Churches: Problems of 'Mobilizing the Religious Front,'" *Commentary*, 19 (April 1955), 386–93.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 393, 387–88, 386, 391, 387.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 393.

Notwithstanding Herberg's efforts, FRASCO made little headway in establishing popularity among liberal Protestants and Jews. Whereas the dynamic evangelist Billy Graham joined the advisory council, Niebuhr kept his distance, even though Lowry sought Niebuhr's support and offered to share confidential planning documents with him. FRASCO's insistence that specific theological premises provided the only reliable basis for an effective anticommunist front likely struck many religious and secular liberals as unnecessary and even dangerous. These figures viewed civil liberties, prominently including religious freedom, as the best antidote to totalitarianism rather than a slippery slope to it. They eschewed FRASCO's explicitly religious definition of democracy, favoring a broader understanding of religious pluralism and viewing a secular public sphere as the precondition for tolerance. To them, FRASCO's Judeo-Christian variant of pluralism appeared so narrowly circumscribed as to be no pluralism at all.³⁷

From Niebuhr to Buckley: Herberg and the *National Review*

Herberg's involvement with FRASCO while writing *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* suggests a new timeline for his turn to conservatism. Scholars have followed the Herberg biographer Harry J. Ausmus in dating that political shift to the period after *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* appeared, culminating in Herberg's appointment as the religion editor of the *National Review* in 1961. In fact, however, Herberg's writings from the early 1950s—especially those penned after the summer of 1952—display all the components of his mature conservatism: a vehement anticommunism, antiliberalism, and antiseccularism; views akin to those of conservative Catholics on church-state questions such as First Amendment jurisprudence, aid to parochial schools, and religious content in public schools; a reverence for the eighteenth-century conservative Edmund Burke and a growing appreciation for the natural law; a view of constitutional democracy as predicated on God's sovereignty; and a commitment to economic and cultural decentralization.³⁸

The surest sign of Herberg's growing conservatism was his repeated claim that his mentor Niebuhr was a conservative. Herberg's case rested on Niebuhr's long-standing appreciation of Burke. After 1949 Niebuhr cited Burke approvingly in several forums, including a 1951 article entitled "We Need an Edmund Burke" and his books *The Irony of American History* (1952) and *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (1953). Herberg revealed his own enthusiasm for Burke in a 1953 review for the Catholic journal *Commonweal*, describing America's founders as "Burkean realists" and lauding the conservatism of

³⁷ John F. Cronin to John J. Wright, March 21, 1957, folder 20, box 10, series 7, Social Action Department Records, National Catholic Welfare Conference—United States Catholic Conference Papers; "FRASCO's Program of Action," folder 35, *ibid.*; Lowry to Reinhold Niebuhr, April 17, 1956, folder "F: miscellaneous," box 6, General Correspondence, Niebuhr Papers.

³⁸ Ausmus, *Will Herberg*, 152–72. On the components of Herberg's conservatism, see Herberg, "Faith and Politics"; Herberg, "Anti-Semitism on the Left"; Will Herberg, "A Jew Looks at Catholics," *Commonweal*, May 22, 1953, pp. 174–77; Herberg, "Sectarian Conflict over Church and State," *Commentary*, On Herberg's appreciation of Edmund Burke's thought, see Will Herberg, "The Dissection of Babbitt Junior," *Commonweal*, April 3, 1953, p. 654; Will Herberg, "Government by Rabble-Rousing," *New Leader*, Jan. 18, 1954, pp. 13–16; and Will Herberg, "Our Conservative Heritage Recaptured," *New Leader*, May 16, 1955, pp. 14–15. Will Herberg, "The Danger of Totalitarian Collectivism," *New Europe*, 4 (Dec. 1944), 33; Will Herberg, "The Ethics of Power," *Jewish Frontier*, 12 (March 1945), 19–23; Herberg, "Semantic Corruption," 10; Herberg, "Personalism versus Totalitarianism," 369–74; Herberg, "Crucial Question" *Commonweal*, Feb. 22, 1946, pp. 473–76; Will Herberg, "For 'Limited' as against 'Total' Unionism," *Labor and Nation*, 1 (April–May 1946), 51–54; Will Herberg, "Is Control a Threat to Freedom?," *This Month*, 2 (July 1946), 77–83.

Peter Viereck's *Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals* (1953). In January 1954 Herberg aligned Niebuhr with Viereck's "responsible neo-Burkean conservatism." Meanwhile, Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* (1953) called Burke the father of American conservatism and placed Niebuhr in that lineage. The following year, Kirk cited Niebuhr's rapid progression "from a flirtation with 'neutralism' to a forthright social conservatism" as evidence of the inextricable "bond between religious conviction and order in society." Clinton Rossiter joined the chorus in 1955, crediting Niebuhr with "a more honest view of man" than "the shallow optimism of the Liberal tradition."³⁹

As this interpretation picked up steam, Niebuhr actively rejected the conservative label. In April 1955 he complained to his biographer June Bingham that "Herberg persists in linking me with conservatism." Niebuhr told her that in a just-published *New Republic* article he had repudiated the "error of equating realism with conservatism just because the thought of the French Enlightenment was both liberal and illusory." Elsewhere, he targeted Kirk's interpretation of Burke. Herberg, undaunted, again stressed Niebuhr's "essentially conservative cast of mind" in 1956, even as he noted Niebuhr's "embarrassed repudiation of the term." Herberg saw conservatism behind Niebuhr's scathing critiques of the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution; his "radical relativization of all political programs, institutions, and movements"; his "thoroughgoing rejection of every form of political rationalism"; and his "renewed emphasis on the historic continuities of social life." Despite Niebuhr's protestations, Herberg concluded, his "kinship with Burke" had earned him "a prominent place in all the recent histories and anthologies of the 'new conservatism.'" This portrait prompted a swift response from Niebuhr, who distinguished the "kind of conservatism I espouse," centered on "an increasing appreciation of the organic factors in social life," from the "decadent liberalism" of America's so-called "conservatism."⁴⁰

Niebuhr's unwillingness to don the conservative mantle eventually pushed Herberg toward William F. Buckley Jr., the ringleader of the emerging New Right. Buckley shared Herberg's recognition that conservatives could capitalize on the fears of secularism and anxieties about religious authenticity that infused Cold War culture and politics. In

³⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, "We Need an Edmund Burke," *Christianity and Society*, 16 (Summer 1951), 6–8; Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York, 1952), 91; Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York, 1953), 72. On Reinhold Niebuhr's engagement with the new conservatism, see Reinhold Niebuhr, "American Conservatism and the World Crisis," *Yale Review*, 40 (March 1951), 385–99. Herberg, "Dissection of Babbitt Junior," 654. On Niebuhr as a conservative, see Peter Viereck, *Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals: Babbitt Junior versus the Rediscovery of Values* (Boston, 1953); and Peter Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited: The Revolt against Revolt, 1815–1949* (New York, 1949). Herberg, "Government by Rabble-Rousing," 13–16. On Herberg's views of conservatism, see Will Herberg, "The Three Dialogues of Man," *New Republic*, May 16, 1955, pp. 28–31. Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind, from Burke to Santayana* (Chicago, 1953), 432–33. Russell Kirk, *A Program for Conservatives* (Chicago, 1954), 100. Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America* (New York, 1955), 254. On Niebuhr and conservatism, see Eduard Heimann, "Niebuhr's Pragmatic Conservatism," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 11 (May 1956), 7–11; Peter Viereck, "Niebuhr in the Conformists' Den," *Christian Scholar*, 39 (Sept. 1956), 224–27; Vigen Guroian, "The Possibilities and Limits of Politics: A Comparative Study of the Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and Edmund Burke," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 36 (Summer 1981), 189–203; and Vigen Guroian, "The Conservatism of Reinhold Niebuhr: The Burkean Connection," *Modern Age*, 29 (Summer 1985), 224–32.

⁴⁰ Niebuhr to Bingham, April 19, 1955, in *Reinhold Niebuhr and John Dewey: An American Odyssey*, by Daniel F. Rice (Albany, 1993), 331. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Liberalism: Illusions and Realities," *New Republic*, July 4, 1955, pp. 11–13. Niebuhr's criticism of Russell Kirk is in Reinhold Niebuhr, "Liberalism and Conservatism," *Christianity and Society*, 20 (Winter 1955), 3–4. Will Herberg, "Christian Apologist to the Secular World," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 11 (May 1956), 15. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York, 1956), 434. John C. Bennett also rejected claims that Niebuhr was a conservative. See John C. Bennett, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Ethics," *ibid.*, 76–77.

God and Man at Yale Buckley accused Yale University's overwhelmingly liberal Protestant faculty of betraying its historic mission by maligning Christianity and the free market and seeking to turn students into socialists. Four years later, in 1955, Buckley founded the *National Review*, the flagship journal of the new conservatism. When Herberg expressed his appreciation for the magazine in the summer of 1957, Buckley replied, "I have respected you for many years." Indeed, Buckley would remain enormously solicitous of Herberg's approval throughout their long friendship, in large part because of the strategic role that Herberg played in Buckley's political project.⁴¹

The context for this budding relationship was Buckley's attempt to define the place of religious faith in the conservative movement. Although the *National Review* fully supported religiosity in the early 1960s, to the extent of excommunicating the atheist Ayn Rand, Buckley initially approached the issue rather gingerly. To keep the magazine from being pigeonholed as a Catholic publication and to avoid any hint of anti-Semitism, Buckley consciously sought out Jewish conservatives to counterbalance the disproportionate number of Catholics on the masthead. But despite his attention to religious parity within the leadership, the *National Review* published strikingly few articles on religion between 1955 and 1960. Only in April 1959 did the editorial board actively begin to seek contributions on religion. They floated possible authors of articles on "the nexus between Christianity and conservatism" and considered soliciting a piece on the plight of the Jewish conservative from Alfred Kohlberg or Morrie Ryskind. In the fall of 1960, Ryskind submitted a piece that, in Buckley's view, dealt quite flippantly with "strained questions involving pro-Catholics, anti-Catholics, pro-Semites, anti-Semites, etc." Buckley summarily rejected it, explaining that "a dogged minority of our readers simply has no sense of humor about these things." Calling himself "skittish" about the religion issue, Buckley cited readership surveys indicating that Catholics made up 48 percent of *National Review* readers, whereas Jews accounted for less than 1 percent.⁴²

The controversy surrounding the Catholic John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign thrust religion onto center stage at the *National Review*. No longer able to bracket the issue, Buckley faced the formidable challenge of cultivating a conservative "spiritual overtone"—one theologically substantive enough to differ from liberal ecumenism but that featured none of the distinctively Catholic markers likely to alienate non-Catholic readers. Ryskind, the only religiously observant Jew in the orbit of the *National Review*, lacked the breadth and sensitivity to write about religion for the magazine's diverse and overwhelmingly Christian audience. Herberg, however, had been thinking for two decades about the role of Judeo-Christian faith in a decentralized political system. He was a rare bird in Jewish circles, and from Buckley's perspective he possessed many appealing traits—especially his antiseccularism, his hostility to strict church-state separation, and perhaps also his anti-Zionism. Herberg's first written contribution appeared just weeks after Buckley rejected a second article by Ryskind. Buckley increasingly distanced himself from Ryskind,

⁴¹ Buckley, *God and Man at Yale*. William F. Buckley Jr. to Herberg, July 19, 1957, Heil-Herrick folder, box 2, William F. Buckley Jr. Papers (Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, Conn.) Buckley to *National Review* editors, Dec. 3, 1958, memo, Will Herberg folder, box 5, *ibid*.

⁴² Jennifer Burns, "Godless Capitalism: Ayn Rand and the Conservative Movement," *Modern Intellectual History*, 1 (Nov. 2004), 1–27. Priscilla Buckley interview by George H. Nash, Jan. 13, 1999, in *Reappraising the Right: The Past and Future of American Conservatism*, by George H. Nash (Wilmington, 2009), 205, 395. "NM" to Buckley and "WAR," April 24, 1959, memo, Inter-Office Memos folder, box 8, Buckley Papers. Morrie Ryskind, "Susskind Show Gets under Skin of Viewer," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 11, 1960, p. B2. Buckley to Mary Ryskind, Sept. 6, 1960, "Ryskind, Morrie" folder, box 11, Buckley Papers.

and Herberg began playing a central role in Buckley's campaign to shape the religious orientation of the *National Review* and the conservative movement more generally.⁴³

In Herberg's fledgling performance in the pages of Buckley's magazine—a review of Clinton Rossiter's *Marxism: The View from America* published shortly after Kennedy's election in November 1960—he made quick work of Rossiter before issuing a Niebuhrian call to conservatives to be self-reflective. Herberg advised readers to resist constructing “a political counter-religion,” a so-called “religion of democracy,” against the “dynamic para-religion” of communism. Arguing that “democracy ‘religionized’ ceases to be democratic at all,” he called American democracy “a limited, constitutional, loose-jointed system of political accommodation in a complex pluralistic society.” Herberg counseled conservatives “to meet the challenge of Communism on various levels with piecemeal answers, reserving our total and unlimited commitment to the ultimate level of religious faith.” To make an idol of democracy, Herberg continued, would be to absolutize the relative and thereby to undermine the religious authenticity of the conservative witness against communism. Buckley embraced Herberg's religious rendering of the new conservatism. In July 1961 he and the board offered Herberg a monthly column and the newly created position of religion editor.⁴⁴

The fit was not perfect at first. As Herberg recognized, *National Review's* editors and readers had little use for Niebuhr. He also worried about being too closely identified with a crass, nationalistic form of conservatism. Although he had embraced the conservative label by 1960, he championed “a well-defined historical conservatism, drawing its inspiration from Edmund Burke,” who had coupled “natural law with a sense of historical continuity.” Such historicism, wrote Herberg, dovetailed nicely with “Anglo-American constitutional democracy, which needs no ideology because it has a history.” Buckley's free-market ideals played little role in Herberg's conservatism, but the two men put aside their differences and pursued a common goal: convincing American Jews to rethink their commitment to liberalism, with its emphasis on strict church-state separation and a secular public sphere. In January 1961, for example, Herberg sent Buckley a newspaper story that urged Jews to be more accommodating of overt expressions of Christianity in the schools. Herberg noted brightly that “the change in Jewish attitudes has begun; in certain quarters, it is fairly well advanced.” His deep distaste for secularism established his kinship with Buckley and allowed him to play a key role in defining the religious orientation of 1960s conservatism.⁴⁵

In his first three editorials for *National Review*, published in late 1961, Herberg portrayed religion as an essential component of authentic conservatism. His opening salvo identified the “inner bond between Liberalism and Jacobinism” as the ideologies' hostility to public expressions of “the traditional religions of the West” and their embrace of “the thoroughly

⁴³ On cultivating a “spiritual overtone,” see Buckley to E. Merrill Root, Feb. 10, 1960, “Root, Merrill” folder, box 11, Buckley Papers. On Morrie Ryskind, see Nash, *Reappraising the Right*, 204–5, 218. On William F. Buckley Jr.'s antisecularism, see James Burnham to Buckley, Oct. 9, 1960, Inter-Office Memos folder, box 10, *ibid.* On Buckley's hostility toward church-state separation, see Buckley to Edwin J. Lukas, Nov. 3, 1959, “Lukas, Edwin J.” folder, box 8, *ibid.* On Buckley's anti-Zionism, see Buckley to Burnham, June 4, 1959, Inter-Office Memos folder, *ibid.* Morrie Ryskind to Buckley, Nov. 4, 1960, “Ryskind, Morrie” folder, box 11, *ibid.* On Buckley distancing himself from Morrie Ryskind, see Morrie Ryskind to Buckley, June 8, 1961, “Ryskind, Morrie” folder, box 16, *ibid.*; Morrie Ryskind to Buckley, July 27, 1961, *ibid.*; and Buckley to Ryskind, Aug. 9, 1961, *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Clinton Rossiter, *Marxism: The View from America* (New York, 1960); Will Herberg, “A Yankee Looks at Marxism,” *National Review*, 9 (Nov. 19, 1960), 314–15. Buckley to *National Review* staff, July 21, 1961, Inter-Office Memos folder, box 14, Buckley Papers.

⁴⁵ Will Herberg, “Historicism as Touchstone,” *Christian Century*, March 16, 1960, pp. 311–13. Herberg to Buckley, Jan. 21, 1961, “Herberg, Will” folder, box 14, Buckley Papers.

secularized laic state.” By defining religion as merely “a matter of personal taste,” liberals had established “the pseudo-religion of secularism,” the “gospel of Liberalism itself,” Herberg charged. Conservatives, by contrast, knew that “religion is the spring of social coherence and civic virtue” because “it humanizes man and so stabilizes society.” Still, Herberg cautioned, prizing religion solely for its social contributions meant embracing a narrowly functionalist view of religion that no true believer could endorse. “Religion sanctions society,” he wrote, “but it cannot become simply its handmaiden; it sustains the social order, but at the same time subjects it to a radical, and what must sometimes seem a shattering, criticism.” He posed to conservatives the same challenge he had earlier directed at liberals: recognize religion as “the moral foundation of civil society” without reducing it to a mere instrument. According to Herberg, only those of deep faith who put their beliefs before politics could meet this challenge. Buckley evidently agreed, writing of the column, “I couldn’t be happier with it.”⁴⁶

Herberg’s second and third editorials further tested Buckley’s commitment to harboring an independent voice on the masthead of his magazine, although the second piece also helped Buckley manage a spat with the Jesuit editors of *America* over the recent encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. Buckley had drawn intense fire from Catholic leaders for criticizing the papal proclamation, which he deemed insufficiently anticommunist. Herberg’s editorial offered an indirect mea culpa and expressed Buckley’s desire to let the matter rest by characterizing Buckley’s quip “Mater, si; Magistra, no!” as too “susceptible to misunderstanding.” In the third editorial Herberg asked the new conservatives to accept his erstwhile mentor as one of their own. He outlined Niebuhr’s thought, including his respect for religion, tradition, history, and community; his sense that the errors of liberalism originated in a faulty Enlightenment view of human nature; and his preference for constitutional systems over direct democracy. According to Herberg, the affinities between Burke and Niebuhr stemmed from a common root: “a profound Christian understanding of the nature of man in society.”⁴⁷

Herberg continued to assert his intellectual independence as he settled into his new role. He privately assured Niebuhr’s colleague John C. Bennett that his first three pieces for the *National Review* had been “directed at challenging the ‘conservative’ prejudices of N.R. readers.” Meanwhile, in a letter to Buckley accompanying the Niebuhr editorial, Herberg expressed his hope “that this column will not irritate you. I know Reinhold Niebuhr is no favorite with you, but honestly I think that you and most ‘conservatives’ misunderstand him—not that he doesn’t leave himself open to misunderstanding.” In response, Buckley declared the piece “splendid,” though he added as a caveat “that Dr. Niebuhr associates himself almost exclusively with non-Burkeans (viz. The New Leader crowd), and that he can’t tell a Communist-front from an Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.” Buckley had passed Herberg’s test. “I should like to find a Liberal editor,” Herberg answered, “who would be as ‘liberal’ as you are in dealing with a contributor as irritating as I have been, at least in the last two columns.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Will Herberg, “Conservatives and Religion: A Dilemma,” *National Review*, Oct. 7, 1961, pp. 230, 232. Buckley to Herberg, Sept. 14, 1961, “Herberg, Will” folder, box 14, Buckley Papers.

⁴⁷ Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950–1985* (Ithaca, 1993), 93–97; Will Herberg, “Controversy over an Encyclical,” *National Review*, Nov. 4, 1961, pp. 299, 302. Will Herberg, “Reinhold Niebuhr: Burkean Conservative,” *National Review*, Dec. 2, 1961, pp. 379, 394.

⁴⁸ Herberg to John C. Bennett, Jan. 17, 1962, folder H, box 1, series 2A, John Coleman Bennett Papers (Burke Library Archives, Union Theological Seminary, New York, N.Y.); Herberg to Buckley, Oct. 29, 1961, “Herberg, Will” folder, box 14, Buckley Papers; Buckley to Herberg, Nov. 3, 1961, *ibid.*; Herberg to Buckley, Nov. 4, 1961, *ibid.*

Meanwhile, Herberg had also passed Buckley's test. Behind the scenes, Buckley went to bat for his new religion editor. Herberg's confrontational style raised the hackles of stalwarts such as Jeffrey Hart, who questioned the equation of Niebuhr with Burke. Although Buckley printed Hart's critical letter, he reiterated his support for Herberg's presence on the staff. To Hart's pointed question, "What do you think of the way Herberg lectures the magazine in his opening paragraph?" Buckley responded, "Herberg's style is orotund," but overall "he's a first-rater." Meanwhile, Herberg gradually learned how to weave his neo-orthodoxy seamlessly with conservative principles. In editorial after editorial, Herberg put a neo-orthodox spin on foundational tenets such as a commitment to natural law. He also claimed—against all evidence—that many Jewish leaders had, like other Americans, responded to the Supreme Court's 1962 decision banning school prayer "with instant and violent disapproval," breaking "the hitherto almost solid front of official Jewish opinion."⁴⁹

While Herberg continued to write for the *National Review* well into the 1970s, he managed to produce a monthly column only during the first five months of his tenure. He wrote six columns in 1962. The number dropped to four in 1963, where it generally hovered thereafter. Already by the summer of 1962, Buckley had taken to badgering Herberg. As the years passed, he struggled to wrest columns from his religion editor. "We so much desire your wisdom and prose in the magazine," Buckley declared on a typical occasion in 1966. He even turned his wicked sense of humor to the cause, as in this request for an article on the counterculture: "My naughty and brilliant friend—would you do me a piece, deadline July 5, on the hippies, LSD, pot, that kind of thing? I don't doubt that your mind is teeming with ideas on the subject, and we over here are nervous and cross, so much time having gone by since the last Herberg. Why not stretch your lines a little and give us something two or three thousand words long? I'll send you a yummy check."⁵⁰

When Buckley finally did get articles out of Herberg, as he did in June 1967, he responded with glowing praise: "A brilliant insight and the ending is memorable. . . . Hurray, hurray, hurray." Buckley's admiring words to the much older Herberg appear to have reflected something more than mere flattery. "You are my moral mentor," he told Herberg in February 1968. That June, in writing to congratulate Herberg on a piece for another journal, Buckley assured him that "you deserve the adulation which I at least have unstintingly proffered you." After a particularly lively luncheon in May 1970, when Herberg observed, "I don't know anyone whom I like to be with and talk about things more with than you," Buckley replied, "I am stimulated and scintillated for weeks after

⁴⁹ Jeffrey Hart, "Niebuhr and the Conservative," *National Review*, Jan. 16, 1962, pp. 34–36. Jeffrey Hart to Buckley, Dec. 4, 1961, "Hart, Jeffrey" folder, box 14, Buckley Papers; Buckley to Hart, Dec. 19, 1961, *ibid.* Will Herberg, "Conservatives, Liberals, and the Natural Law, I," *National Review*, June 5, 1962, pp. 407, 422. *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). Will Herberg, "Religious Symbols in Public Life," *National Review*, Aug. 28, 1962, p. 145. Contrary to Herberg's account, Jonathan D. Sarna observes that "the overwhelming majority of American Jews" favored the *Engel v. Vitale* decision: Jonathan D. Sarna, "American Jews and Church-State Relations: The Search for 'Equal Footing,'" in *Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience*, ed. Sarna and Dalin, 69.

⁵⁰ Buckley to Herberg, July 17, 1962, "Herberg, Will" folder, box 20, Buckley Papers; Buckley to Herberg, Jan. 25, 1966, "Herberg, Will" folder, box 39, *ibid.* For another example of Buckley's cajoling, see Buckley to Herberg, June 14, 1966, *ibid.* Buckley to Herberg, June 27, 1967, telegram, "Herberg, Will" folder, box 43, *ibid.*; Buckley to Herberg, Feb. 28, June 20, 1968, "Herberg, Will" folder, box 50, *ibid.*; Herberg to Buckley, May 27, 1970, folder 988, box 156, series 1, *ibid.*; Buckley to Herberg, June 10, 1970, *ibid.*



This photo of Will Herberg (left) and William F. Buckley Jr. (right) was taken at an event hosted by Drew University in January 1974, just two years before Herberg's death. In anticipation of this reunion Buckley wrote to Herberg: "You must know that there are very few people I rate as on par with you, intellectually, or as friends. And no one is superior to you as a teacher." (*William F. Buckley Jr. to Will Herberg, Dec. 10, 1973, William F. Buckley Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.*) Photo courtesy Special Collections and Archives, Drew University Library.

lunching with you. . . . How on earth did you ever manage to learn as much as you did?" A strong core of genuine respect lay behind Buckley's playful, over-the-top compliments to Herberg, and the feeling was mutual.⁵¹

What does Herberg's trajectory from atheistic Marxism to Judeo-Christian conservatism mean for the larger narrative of American religious pluralism? *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* is routinely read as an assertion of inclusion—one Jew's courageous attempt to place his coreligionists on equal footing with Christians. But Herberg declared that Jews could take their seat at the table only if they defined their identity in religious terms. This narrowly construed pluralism actually retreated from some of the early and mid-twentieth century's more expansive conceptions of American identity, such as the cosmopolitanism and cultural pluralism embraced by many theological liberals and naturalists.⁵²

Herberg's book bears comparison with John Courtney Murray's *We Hold These Truths* (1960), another Cold War-era attempt to find middle ground between the establishment of a single religion and a thoroughgoing secularism. Herberg saw prophetic faith in much the same way that Murray saw the natural law: a politically salient but nonsectarian body

⁵¹ Buckley to Herberg, June 14, 1967, "Herberg, Will" folder, box 43, Buckley Papers.

⁵² On the reaction against Jewish secularism, in which Herberg participated, see Levitt, "Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism, and Jewish Difference." David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York, 1995); David A. Hollinger, "After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity," *Journal of American History*, 98 (June 2011), 21–48.

of beliefs shared by Christians and Jews, and a common religious foundation that accommodated a limited degree of religious pluralism yet still asserted America's Judeo-Christian heritage. Both Herberg and Murray sought to open the religious mainstream to their own faiths, but they also hoped to circumscribe American pluralism to preserve what they regarded as the spiritual and political core of the West. Each crafted a compromise position designed to stave off a freewheeling embrace of all religious views, including atheism, humanism, and non-Western traditions. Indeed, this affinity may explain why Murray understood the political thrust of *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* better than other reviewers. He zeroed in on the implications of Herberg's account for school funding, declaring that the nation's "pluralist religious-social structure" called for "aid to the religious school."⁵³

Buckley likewise sought a middle ground between the Protestant parochialism of the Old Right and the moral permissiveness he associated with liberalism. He envisaged a conservatism that was religiously committed yet ecumenical within Judeo-Christian limits. Herberg's prophetic faith, which was pitched at Jews as well as Christians and did not bear the Catholic overtones of Murray's natural law, meshed perfectly with Buckley's vision. Still, Herberg struggled with additional questions of religious authenticity that Buckley did not share. Buckley, born wealthy and Catholic in an intensely Protestant power structure, stood half inside and half outside the American establishment. Herberg, by contrast, came from much further outside the centers of power and had embraced religion only in his late thirties.

Perhaps the greatest irony of Herberg's story, however, is that he remained deeply conflicted about his own religious identity, even as he followed Niebuhr in scrutinizing the religious authenticity of others. Although interpreters have made much of Herberg's near conversion in the early 1940s, that was not the last of his flirtations with Christianity. Tucked away in Herberg's papers is a handwritten note from an admirer scrawled atop a 1954 bulletin from the Catholic parish church of Fordham University, near Herberg's home in Washington Heights, New York. It raises the question of whether Herberg attended services there. Moreover, Buckley recalled that Herberg told attendees at a dinner party that he had been thinking of converting to either Catholicism or Lutheranism around the time he joined the *National Review*, though he ultimately remained with Judaism. Some years later, Richard John Neuhaus referred in passing to commentators who challenged Herberg's "Jewish credentials" and considered him a "crypto-Christian."⁵⁴

We may never know what Herberg truly believed, nor why he fabricated his degrees or how he managed his deceptions psychologically. It is certain that throughout Herberg's years as a spokesperson for American Judaism he found the vast majority of his coreligionists profoundly disappointing, and his disillusionment only deepened over time.⁵⁵ We should view Herberg's classic contribution to the sociology of American religion through this lens. Far

⁵³ Murray, *We Hold These Truths*. John Courtney Murray, "The School Problem in the Mid-twentieth Century," in *The Role of the Independent School in American Democracy*, ed. William H. Conley (Milwaukee, 1956), 4–5, 9.

⁵⁴ Handwritten note by "JNM" on a program from Our Lady of Mercy Parish, Fordham University, New York, N.Y., [ca. 1954], folder 17, Herberg Collection. William F. Buckley Jr., "Morality and American Society," *Religion and Liberty*, 2 (May–June 1992). Richard John Neuhaus, "Serving a Jealous God," *National Review*, July 14, 1989, p. 53.

⁵⁵ On Herberg's disappointment and disillusionment with American religion, including the entire spectrum of American synagogal organizations, see Will Herberg interview by William F. Buckley, n.d., transcript, folder 229, Herberg Collection.

from capturing a powerful dynamic of inclusion in postwar America, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* reveals the continuing complexities of religious identity and difference in a polyglot society where religion's public function and meaning are constantly being negotiated. Was Buckley's reference to Herberg as his "moral mentor" a sign of genuine appreciation or empty flattery? Whatever the case, Herberg clearly helped Buckley infuse the new conservatism with religious overtones substantial enough to unite, but subtle enough not to divide its newly diverse constituency. Although *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* tells us something about the growth of religious pluralism in the postwar period, it also speaks to the decline of liberal Protestantism, the rise of modern conservatism and neoconservatism, and the changing boundaries of religious authenticity since World War II. Herberg's story opens a window onto the potent anxieties about religious authenticity and secularity that permeated American culture during the early Cold War years.