The concern of Pope Paul VI that cultures be evangelized “in depth and right to their very roots” has been taken up, deepened and amplified by Pope John Paul II in his writings concerning the “culture of life” and the “new evangelization.” What exactly it might mean for a given national culture to be evangelized in this way will obviously depend largely on its own unique character. Britain has, for example, unique characteristics due to the nature of its Reformation, the myths of heroism (King Arthur and so on) that lie deep within the consciousness of its peoples, and its relatively recent loss of a world empire. The United States has a very different history and a different set of myths. Nevertheless, in common with most if not all Western nations, despite their profound differences, both Britain and the United States share in a single cultural dynamic known variously as “modernity” and “liberalism.” Furthermore, they are experiencing modernity in many ways as a crisis for which their history has ill-prepared them. A loss of faith in the Christian and Classical traditions is connected with the fragmentation of Christendom through schism upon schism, and the sheer social and psychological impact of accelerating technological change.

The contemporary split between faith and culture seems to have been understood profoundly by many Christian writers of the last hundred or more years, from John Henry Newman through G.K. Chesterton to C.S. Lewis and Christopher Dawson. But I find the most profound and helpful analysis to date (of course, building on the work of these earlier thinkers) in the writings of the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (d. 1988) and his foremost American interpreter, David L. Schindler. The latter has recently published *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, a book which, although difficult, should be essential reading for anyone concerned with the modern crisis. The book draws out the implications of Balthasar’s theology for the evangelization and transformation of culture, providing a cultural critique that is all the more penetrating for being founded on a positive vision of the Christian vocation in the world.

The new evangelization, correctly understood, subsumes and goes beyond the numerous previous attempts at a “theology of liberation” by the principles that would give form to a new Christian culture, a “culture of life.” The new culture must be capable of integrating all the legitimate concerns of our era, including respect for individual conscience, for cultural diversity, for scientific progress, for the dignity of women and the poor, for the integrity and sustainability of the natural environment, and so on. Consequently, a “return to Christendom” is neither feasible nor desirable.

The split between faith and culture developed, according to Balthasar, with the separation of theology from the spiritual life. The creation of supposedly autonomous academic disciplines such as “theology” and “philosophy” brought
in its train the separation of the "transcendental properties of being"—i.e., of Beauty from her "sisters Truth and Goodness, no longer perceived as mutually dependent. While religion increasingly became a matter of moralism or fideism (of truth grasped by the will), science after Bacon and Descartes became increasingly shallow, constructivist, and utilitarian. Our age has witnessed the victory of expertise over wisdom, quantity over quality, action over contemplation...and Deism over Trinitarian Christianity. An abstract and empty freedom has triumphed over the concrete love incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Beauty lies in the unity of Truth and Goodness, and is in a certain sense what holds them together. Once this connection has been lost, religion becomes less a response to God’s revealed glory than a semi-Pelagian attempt to grasp (and ultimately manipulate) doctrine and ethics. But religion, as Christopher Dawson showed in detail, is the source of the dynamic spirit that permeates every culture. The great obstacle or challenge to the new evangelization is therefore a sense of the self as primarily active, rather than receptive, in relation to God and to being, a "technological attitude" the all-pervasiveness of which renders it virtually invisible, and any opposition to it extremely difficult. Even our reactions to the overt symptoms of degeneracy in our culture (e.g., ultraviolent videos, the breakdown of families, the rise of drugs) tend to be colored by it and therefore to feed the flames.

What gives Balthasar’s analysis its teeth is the realization that the “autonomy” of the secular has for a long time been wrongly understood. The institutions of our society, both economic and political; the methods of science; the principles governing town planning and architecture; the activities of artists and patrons of the arts; all of these are generally assumed, even by Catholics, to be morally or theologically neutral, and therefore to be accepted as givens before evangelization begins. Not so, says Professor Schindler. The institutions and structures that constitute our present world culture embody a “logic or abstraction from God that secularizes the culture and disposes it towards a technocratic-consumerist nihilism.” To evangelize, to liberate, to transform, we must recognize this as a structural sin. “We cannot hope to resolve the problems besetting modern Western society if we begin by bracketing the question of relation to God embodied in its structures, because bracketing that question itself constitutes the source and deepest context of all those problems.”

The fear that such a response naturally provokes in our contemporaries is the fear of a new integralism, a kind of totalitarian Catholicism. It might seem that Balthasar’s radical critique of modernity and call to conversion carries with it the implication that all Catholics should work towards a theocratic Catholic state, in which important modern freedoms will be curtailed in the name of Trinitarian love and the spirit of “obedience to the truth.” This fear is the result of a complete failure to understand the principles and spirit of the critique. Trinitarian love is, in fact, the only basis for a true liberation of the human person, and thereby of an authentic social, cultural, and even religious
pluralism. A love that traces its origins to the Holy Trinity is a love that respects the other as other, and not merely as an instrument of the self. Furthermore, a Church that represents this "fairest love" cannot possibly impose a religious faith or determine the policies of a government. All she can do is promote, by any means consistent with her mission, the dignity of each human being as such.

If the application of that principle reduces the range of human expression in one respect, by militating against many forms of institutional and personal injustice, so much the better. The creative diversity of cultures that do respect human dignity will be greater, because Trinitarian love is intrinsically fertile and regenerative. Merely to ban abortion and euthanasia, to censor violence on television and outlaw guns and drugs on the streets—in other words, to counterreact to the culture of death—is not enough. Love casts out fear, and it casts out the shadows by shining. A culture of life would find creative solutions for women who may be pressured into having an abortion by economic or social circumstance. In the hard cases that no change in public policy can prevent, the refusal to have an abortion would be recognized and valued for what it is: an act of heroism, calling for the utmost respect and support.

However, this is not the place to discuss details of public policy. Nor does Professor Schindler’s book do so: he is necessarily concerned simply to establish the principles that would define a new moral architecture for society, principles based on a transformed understanding of the Church’s relation to the world. Schindler himself is editor of the English-language edition of the international Catholic review *Communio*, where many of the chapters of this volume first appeared in earlier drafts. The review was founded over twenty years ago by Balthasar, along with his teacher Henri de Lubac, and his friends and colleagues Josef Ratzinger, Jean Danielou, and Louis Bouyer. It has since blossomed into thirteen different language editions, including an Arabic edition edited in Beirut. Seeing Schindler’s essays gathered together with so much new material, one begins to get a sense of the inexhaustible vision that lay behind the founding of the review in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. It is a vision of the renewal of all things in Christ, of a Christian anthropology and even a Christian cosmology that has increasingly come to shape the direction of the Church’s development under Pope John Paul II.

The book focuses on Catholic liberalism, beginning with the work of John Courtney Murray, the American Jesuit who helped prepare the ground for *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Council’s great *Declaration on Religious Liberty*. That Declaration represented the most radical apparent break with the tradition of all Catholic documents—at least according to Archbishop Lefebvre and its other conservative critics. It is vitally important, therefore, for Catholics to understand the *Declaration* correctly, as an authentic development of doctrine—or at least a development in the application of doctrine to a modern situation. Schindler’s contention is that, despite Murray’s enormous contributions to
Catholic thought, his work disposes Catholics to liberalism in a way that the Council itself does not. It “Americanizes” the interpretation of the Council. There is a “logical ambivalence” in Murray’s position that (contrary to Murray’s own intention) actually undermines religious freedom by causing it to “collapse” into a kind of liberal dogmatism.

Schindler then moves on to his critique of the most influential contemporary Catholic liberals, the so-called “neoconservatives,” led by Michael Novak, Richard John Neuhaus, and George Weigel. Here again, his argument is subtle, distinguishing between the undeniably Catholic intentions of these authors and the “unintended logic” of their stated positions. According to Schindler, the neoconservatives are too quick to baptize the American style of economic liberalism and thus fail to recognize consumerism as a structure of sin—as Pope John Paul II clearly does. Drawing on the work of Jewish sociologist Will Herberg and Catholic philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, Schindler exposes the anthropology of the Scottish Enlightenment lurking beneath the false neutrality of the “articles of peace” and the “empty freedom” granted to religion by our main social and economic institutions.

The neoconservative solution poses itself as the only credible alternative to a Catholic integralism of the Right or the Left, but Schindler insists that there is a “third way” based on the “communio ecclesiology” implicit in the Council itself. The Church must not be absorbed into the world, as the liberationists have tended to do, but it cannot maintain its independence by remaining merely “juxtaposed” alongside the world, attempting to influence it for the better. There is a deeper and more intimate relation between the two, and here the best analogy is found in an ideal marriage, where each spouse is fulfilled through a union with the other without losing his or her own integrity—indeed, in such a union the integrity of each is deepened and confirmed.

In a powerful, compact passage from Balthasar’s Love Alone frequently quoted by Schindler, the theologian writes that “whenever the relationship between nature and grace is severed...then the whole of worldly being falls under the dominion of ‘knowledge,’ and the springs and forces of love immanent in the world are overpowered and finally suffocated by science, technology, and cybernetics.” The consequence is “a world without women, without children, without reverence for love in poverty and humiliation—a world in which power and the profit-margin are the sole criteria, where the disinterested, the useless, the purposeless is despised, persecuted, and in the end exterminated...” It is the severing of the relationship between nature and grace that lies behind the crisis of the modern world. Perhaps this is a formulation that will only make sense to a theologian, but if so we may substitute for word “grace” the word “love.” Professor Schindler finds the love revealed in Jesus Christ as “constitutive of all of creation, as affecting intrinsically every fiber of every being in the cosmos.” He sees contemplative and Marian receptivity at the very foundation of Christian existence. He sees the Christian’s activity as taking its primary form “from within the spousal union given in the
Eucharist and the *fiat,*” adding that these “are not merely ‘private’ sources of moral inspiration for worldly activity,” but the inner form of the world as world. This is the starting point for any effective evangelization of culture, any renewal of our civilization as it enters the new millenium.

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**Notes**

1. A somewhat different version of this review, aimed at different audience, also appears in a recent issue of *Cultures and Faith,* the journal of the Pontifical Council on Cultures.

2. See, in particular, two issues of *Communio:* Winter 1994 (XXI:4) and Summer 1995 (XXII:2). In the former, Lorenzo Albacete compares the new evangelization to liberation theology in “The Praxis of Resistance.”

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*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a great blessing for the Church in this period after the Second Vatican Council. The Council, in its Constitution *Dei Verbum* (The Constitution on Divine Revelation), solemnly proclaimed the tradition of the Church that Christianity is a revealed religion and that God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will. Nevertheless, a form of what may be called neo-Modernism has become widespread in the Church, particularly among the professional catechists and teachers of theology. For many of them, Catholic teaching is not based on the Word of God as it comes to us through the two channels of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and is discerned by the Magisterium of the Church. Many dissenters from the faith of the Church have attempted to re-constitute Catholic teaching on the basis of religious experience and feminist theology.

As I was reading *Flawed Expectations,* the newspapers carried a notification from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith that a theologian, Father Tissa Balasuriya, has deviated from the integrity of the truth of the Catholic faith and cannot be considered a Catholic theologian. He has also been excommunicated because of the positions he took. The reason for this action is that Father Balasuriya does not recognize the supernatural, unique, and irrepeateable character of the revelation of Jesus Christ. He considers