Preface

Conservatism, which dominated American political life during the 1980s, was a negligible influence thirty years before, and its political and intellectual development in the years after 1950 has not been fully explained. From its inception the American conservative movement has been a hybrid, born of contradictory ideological components and deeply divided on such issues as laissez-faire capitalism, individualism and the family, and the role of religion in society. The political crises of the 1960s and 1970s exposed many of the tensions in the growing conservative movement but the social dislocations of those decades strengthened its electoral appeal. Ideological conservatives, despite their unresolved theoretical dilemmas, came to power with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and presided over national politics for the next twelve years.

This book explores one of the major strands in the development of the conservative intellectual movement, the fundamental role of Catholics. It implicitly challenges the view that evangelical Protestantism and libertarian economic theories were the chief components of the movement. Catholic laypeople worked out many of the principles of the new conservatism, beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, organizing journals in the 1950s and gradually winning the adherence of other intellectual and electoral groups. Not all U.S. Catholics were political conservatives, of course, but the church's hierarchy, traditions, and faith in the natural law were conducive to conservative thought in the cold war era. Even Catholic liberals in the 1950s were militantly anti-Communist and skeptical of the secular liberalism voiced by their non-Catholic contemporaries.

As the conservative movement gathered political momentum in the following decades, ironically, U.S. Catholicism itself underwent profound changes and lost much of its old conservative character. Hitherto

a monolithic organization dominated by powerful bishops, who presided over a clearly defined social community with distinctive views, it became, in the 1960s and 1970s, contentious and fragmentary, no longer united on any religious, political, or social issue. Largely responsible for this transformation was the coincidence of the Second Vatican Council with America's social upheavals of the 1960s. After the council political and religious disagreement increased dramatically, widening divisions not only between liberals and conservatives but also among Catholic conservatives, with some linking their faith to a militant nationalism while others used it to condemn the nation for its sins. As a result of these disputes the centrality of Catholicism to the conservative movement diminished just as the movement itself was coming to power.

The Introduction outlines the principal elements of this story and examines the characteristic problems of conservative and Catholic history and historiography. Chapter 1 then draws an impressionistic picture of American Catholicism in the 1950s. It emphasizes Catholics' sense of distinctiveness, the importance of anticommunism as a rallying point for Catholics eager to exhibit their patriotic credentials, the first stirrings of liberal Catholicism, and Catholicism's intellectual and educational problems of the 1950s, which occasioned several controversies. Chapter 2 shows how, against this background, the new conservative movement took shape, chiefly through the efforts of William F. Buckley, Jr., and how it drew on themes in the work of an older generation of Catholic conservative intellectuals, including Ross Hoffman and Francis Graham Wilson. The movement's first crises, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's visits to the United States, provoked an all-but-unanimous anti-Communist outcry, whereas debates over the legitimacy of laissez-faire capitalism bore witness to a growing diversity of views.

Chapters 3 and 4 follow the fortunes of Catholic conservative intellectuals into the volatile 1960s. Chapter 3 shows how the election of John F. Kennedy, the civil rights movement, the decolonization of Africa, and Supreme Court decisions on prayer and Bible reading in public schools each occasioned alarm by seeming to contradict deeply held conservative principles. It shows, further, how the accelerating nuclear weapons race of the era prompted a Catholic debate about whether the nation could justifiably fight an annihilating nuclear war against the Soviet Union and whether God had chosen the United States as the citadel of Christendom. Chapter 4, on the later 1960s, demonstrates how the fallout from the social crisis of those years and from the Second Vatican Council created sharp divisions in American

Catholicism, as in the society at large. Those years witnessed the rise of a militant Catholic Left dedicated to direct protest actions against the American war in Vietnam and a no-less-militant Catholic conservatism dedicated to direct protest actions against liberalized abortion laws, while bewildered moderate nationalist conservatives struggled to come to terms with the spirit of the Vatican Council and the politics of upheaval.

In Chapter 5, I switch from an analytical narrative to a thematic discussion, in order to unravel the intricate Catholic response to the "sexual revolution" and to explain its philosophical, legal, and institutional consequences. Questions relating to sexuality and the family were central to Catholic controversy in the 1970s, eclipsing all other issues in their perceived urgency. The Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* set off a reconfiguration of Catholic conservative activists, some of whom dedicated themselves to antiabortion work as *the* issue for political action. The work of legal scholars, notably John T. Noonan, Jr., and Charles Rice, and the example of women who opposed abortion, notably Clare Boothe Luce and Ellen Wilson, are here singled out for illumination.

Chapters 6 and 7 are designed to explore more thoroughly some of the generalizations made in the narrative chapters. In each of them I compare the work of two men in the period from the early 1950s to the early 1980s to show how, in particular cases, Catholic conservatives could draw different lessons from the contingencies they faced. Chapter 6 investigates the work of John Lukacs and Thomas Molnar, two Hungarians who came to the United States as anti-Communist exiles after World War II. Both contributed to the international outlook of the new conservatism, and both used their faith to challenge conventional verities in their disciplines, Lukacs in history, Molnar in philosophy. Chapter 7 examines two indigenous Catholic conservatives, Garry Wills and Michael Novak, to show how similar events led them to opposite conclusions, Novak becoming more of a capitalist-nationalist, Wills moving in the opposite direction.

The Epilogue looks at the transformed face of American Catholicism in the 1980s, using as a symbolic episode the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter on nuclear weapons *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) and the resistance to its teaching by a lay Catholic group led by Michael Novak. It then surveys the new generation of Catholic traditionalists who have taken up the cause of orthodoxy, antiabortion, and profamily politics, writers dismayed by what seem to them worsening conditions of political, social, and intellectual life in contempo-

rary America but eager, though they think it a forlorn hope, to stop the flood.

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