

POLARIZATION IN THE CHURCH: PHENOMENOLOGY, ETIOLOGY, THERAPY

The frequency with which the labels "conservative" and "progressive" are labeled as useless¹ is matched only by the stubbornness with which they continue being used. It is my contention that they are valid and useful terms for describing two different mentalities that are imbued by varying world views and inclined to adopt contrasting attitudes towards human conduct. The contention implies three statements which it is useful to bring out right at the beginning:

First, contrary to the "popular" belief that conservative and progressive are extreme positions with respect to which the wise moderate should be in the middle, professional studies hold what can be termed the two-mentalities theory.² Second, the conservative as defined here might be more familiar to many as the reactionary arch-conservative. Third, the conservative position is the one that goes against man's true nature and has therefore to be explained as being problematic.

Experience from discussing the issue has revealed to the present writer that the main thesis of his paper is subject to frequent and persistent misunderstanding. In the first place, it seems to many that an unduly harsh judgment is made of the conservative. However, such an impression is due only to one's own progressive bias! In fact, a conservative, even with the various characteristics which we shall attribute to him, will call himself a conservative and will be proud of being one.

In the second place, this paper clearly takes sides and accuses the conservative of taking the wrong position by refusing to leave the "old"

¹Cf. Thomas Dubay, "Renewal: Testing the Assumptions," *America*, September 4, p. 126, and Andrew M. Greeley, "Scholarship Counts: Conservative, Liberal Labels Irrelevant," *The Catholic Messenger*, January 28, 1971.

²Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Layman in the Church, and Other Essays* (New York: Alba House, 1963), pp. 67-92; Michael Novak, *The Open Church. Vatican II, Act II* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 343-62; and more recently F. Haarsma, "Alternatieve groepen in de kerk," *Theologie en Pastoraat* 67, No. 4 (1971), 308-16, and 68, No. 3 (1972), 212-24.

world when it should be obvious that a new world is in the making. What I am describing here is the ideal or theoretical position of the progressive who, for himself, has taken the definitive step—and this without suffering too much in the transition from the old to the new. The entrenched conservative, on the other hand, refuses or is unable to make the transition—and it is this that stands in need of what will in fact be a psychological explanation.

However, if it is a question of not what ideally *should be* but what *is*, a complication arises in the practical realm of ecclesiastical politics. Then we have to deal, from the viewpoint of the progressive, with the power of the status quo and with vested interests. To mention the most likely instances, there may be a clash between progressive parishioners and a conservative pastor, between progressive priests and a conservative hierarchy, and finally, between a progressive national hierarchy and a conservative Vatican.

The greater problem, therefore, is not, as we shall see later, the pastoral communication between progressive leaders and those entrusted to their care, but the disciplinary relation between progressives and those in higher authority who have the conservative mentality. Recent events in the Dutch Church, especially in its relation with the Vatican, have provided empirical evidence, as it were, that the long way advocated by the Dutch bishops or the "policy of gradualism,"³ including the tension it makes allowance for, is a little unrealistic and might have to be replaced by what Dutch sociologists had for years feared as a possibility, the conflict model. However, this paper limits itself to the ideal situation of what should and can be achieved under wise progressive leadership and the pastoral difficulties encountered at the grassroots level of those not in authority.

³Cf. Bernard F. Donahue, "Current Strategies of Change in the Church," *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 71, No. 3 (December, 1970), 184-89. The article deals with the practicalities of church politics as to how to achieve, or to stop, renewal. The traditionalist positions of the article are similar to our own (arch-)conservative attitudes, while the renewalist positions resemble what we will term the "wild progressive" attitude.

CONSERVATIVES AND PROGRESSIVES:
A PHENOMENOLOGY

There have been various attempts to indicate what exactly constitutes a person (or an opinion)⁴ as either conservative or progressive. In a little book on the first session of the Vatican Council, *A Struggle of Minds*,⁵ Schillebeeckx described it as the contrast between essentialists and existentialists. This can be termed a philosophical criterion since it refers to what is in fact a philosophical outlook, whether this be held explicitly or implicitly. Similarly, Michael Novak in another book about the Vatican Council, *The Open Church*,⁶ chose a distinction which can be termed psychological, viz. the contrast of a closed church and an open church, closed-minded persons and open-minded persons.

Both ways of describing and contrasting the two "mentalities" are useful but may be supplemented by a third which, at least in its emphasis, is my own invention: the conservative is a *repeater* while the progressive is a *thinker*. This I call the phenomenological criterion insofar as it simply (although not without some value judgment) describes what we see being the case with two groups or types of persons.

A "logical" order can be shown to exist between the three determinants of each of the two series, an order which at the same time leads to the explanation of the fourth and original contrast dyad, conservative and progressive. A person with a *closed* mind does not think for himself but merely *repeats* the traditional formulas (as he learned them in his youth). Since these formulas, expressed as they are in abstract and universal concepts, signify timeless *essences*, there is no cause for progress and one is bound to be a *conservative*. The person with an *open* mind attempts to be an independent *thinker* (although ideally in a community of like-minded people). He re-interprets the historical formulas of the past in the light of the present situation, i.e., of man's

⁴The same person may be conservative in one respect and progressive in another respect. But the general rule is that a person is consistently either conservative or progressive along the whole line.

⁵This is the title of the English edition of the book quoted in footnote 2. It is a section heading in the pertinent essay: "The Second Vatican Council."

⁶See Novak, *The Open Church*.

existence, and since real life is in constant flux he cannot help but move along with it and be a *progressive*. To put it perhaps a little too sharply, the conservative lives in the immutable, conceptual world of Platonic ideas, and his knowledge terminates at those concepts.⁷ The progressive, while still using concepts, extracts them from, applies them to, and judges them in the light of the real-life situation of the present-day world.⁸

If, then, there is this contrast between the conservative and progressive mentalities, there is no room for the popular belief in a "middle-of-the-road," or in a "center," of which one may be to the right or left. We therefore speak of the two-mentalities theory which is adopted by the professional students of the issue. To quote a 1973 writer, after the early Vatican II Schillebeeckx and Novak, David F. Wells in *Revolution in Rome* maintains: "A new mentality has become ascendant in the Roman church and it stands at marked variance with the old. The differences between the two mentalities are substantial and irreconcilable. [There is] a gulf between the two mentalities."⁹

The mentalities theory denies the idea that the distinction between conservatives and progressives is vague or useless, as also that there is the possibility and need of dialogue between the two groups. The mistaken idea that a middle road or dialogue are possible or even required seems to be caused by conceiving "conservative" and "progressive" as relative notions: one can be a progressive, i.e., advanced or ahead, only at the expense of another who is so kind as to stay behind or stand still, viz., a conservative.

Behind the relative conception of the two notions lies a spatial imagery, either of a latitudinal or a longitudinal nature. The latitudinal

⁷Cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Language of the Tribe," *Commonweal*, August 22, 1969, pp. 505-508.

⁸The preceding paragraphs have made it clear that I do believe in "labels," contrary to the position referred to in footnote 1. Yet, I also agree with Greeley's "Scholarship counts" and Dubay's "Intelligence, not labels, settles debates" ("Renewal: Testing the Assumptions"), but in this paper the use of scholarship and intelligence is attributed to the open-minded progressive thinker, in this ideal (ized) version of him.

⁹Quoted according to *The Christian Century*, February 7, 1973, pp. 184-85.

image pictures conservatives and progressives as "extremes," with respect to which one ought to be in, or operate from, the "middle." The longitudinal image thinks of the progressive as being "too far out front," while the conservative does "not go far enough." In both cases, the self-styled wise moderate who says he aims at finding the proper balance is a Don Quixote dreaming of the impossible.

Although we have now excluded the middle-ground position, it does not follow that each Catholic belongs to the one or the other of the two groups. For when we survey the present scene in the Church, we discover that persons have to be classified in a fashion much more complicated or subtle than seems suggested by the conservative-progressive dyad.

Let us begin with attacking the problem of a typology of progressives. There appear to be two types of progressives: the truly thinking person, and the mere repeater of progressive slogans. Hence we have what I like to call the true, *wise progressive*¹⁰ and the would-be, *wild progressive*. Moreover—and this is the basis for fruitful dialectic—it is within the group of the true, wise progressives that we find the more moderate and the more radical progressives. In turn, the wild progressive can be termed a "rebel," as he is defined by several writers in contrast with the revolutionary.¹¹

Let us now turn to the conservative, whose description initiated above is not very flattering (in my eyes!). The conservative described in the professional studies is more commonly known as the *reactionary*.¹²

¹⁰The term *liberal* will be avoided here, because of its loaded political and historico-theological implications. The term *radical* will be used here only in a specified sense, since the term is often taken in the pejorative sense of "revolutionary," the latter word also taken in the pejorative sense (cf. footnote 11). See however Aelred Graham's distinction between "superficial" and "radical" in *The End of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), Chap. 7, No. 62.

¹¹Cf. Herman Berger, *De progressieve en de conservatieve mens* (Nijmegen-Utrecht: The Netherlands, 1969), p. 110. The revolutionary is defined in a positive sense by Erich Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays* (Anchor Books; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 149-72, and Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1972), pp. 117-48.

¹²A letter from the conservative group "Committee of Catholic Laymen Pro

We must therefore use, for the "typical" conservative, such qualifying terms (really: disqualifying) as: die-hard, entrenched, arch-conservative. This type is represented in such publications as *The Wanderer, Triumph*, as also the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*.¹³ But traces of such a reactionary-conservative attitude are also found in various statements by diocesan and Vatican officials—hence giving attention to it is more than an otiose issue.

Besides the "true," i.e., arch-conservative, there appear to be, caught in the middle¹⁴ as it were, two if not three types of persons who can be called conservatives only improperly and whose existence has given rise to the misleading phrase "silent majority." They are the sincerely and deeply *disturbed* Catholic, the *confused or ignorant* Catholic, and the not-interested, *apathetic* Catholic. The sections on etiology and therapy will further describe these sub-types.

The above specifications allow us to gain a better insight into this paper's insistence on excluding the feasibility of the middle-of-the-road position between the extremes.

We can speak of "extremists" in an improper sense only, since the notion presupposes the existence of a "balance," or the right place "in the middle"—but the thrust of the two-mentalities theory is precisely that this is out of the question. But we still may speak of extremes, namely, insofar as appearances or initial and superficial impressions are concerned. But in doing so, we must take extreme care that the groups indicated as such are indeed the utter extremes, and not situated somewhere left or right from either one of the true extremes. Accord-

Ecclesia" (no date) quotes James Hitchcock as writing: "conservatives (read: *reactionaries*," and "progressives (read: *liberals*)" (italics in the original).

¹³Besides the "normal" (arch-)conservative there are the super-, ultra- or hardcore conservatives, represented by such groups as the Marian Foundation, Feasterville, Pa., and the Remnant Press, St. Paul, Minn.

¹⁴The term *middle* in the "uncommitted" sense is used by William J. Bausch, *Renewal and the Middle Catholic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides, 1971), and William Doty, *A View from the Middle* (Liguori, Mo.: Liguorian Paperbacks, 1972). When however the publishers of the last book describe as its purpose "to pave a middle road between thoughtless change and mental immobility," it would be in the spirit of this paper to prefer "thoughtful change" as the proper alternative to "mental immobility."

ing to our specified classification the true extremes would seem to be, on the one hand, the wild progressives or as they are also called, the wild-eyed liberals, and on the other hand, not only the hardcore conservatives but also the "ordinary" (arch-)conservatives, as the latter are being defined here.

As soon as the extremes have thus been indicated, it can be shown that, fundamentally and psychologically, we have to do with an optical illusion. This is indicated in a saying found in various languages (French, Italian, Dutch), that "extremes touch each other." The closest equivalent in English is that extremists of both left and right have come full circle, thus meeting each other on the same spot. Moreover, although we speak of "going from one extreme to another," the psychological explanation points out a basic identity between the two seeming extremes. Thus in the case of the love-hate phenomenon, it is the presence of a strong emotional disposition that accounts for the appearance of the opposite manifestations.

A basic similarity between the hardcore conservative and the wild progressive has been declared by those who regard both of them as "rebels."¹⁵ The intolerant stance of both of these extremists has also often been noted, specifically by those who speak of a new authoritarianism of the left. More soberly, the basic similarity between the wild progressive and the "pure type" conservative has already been alluded to in our own phenomenological criterion, when it defined the conservative as a repeater, a quality which is also found in the wild progressive who merely repeats the progressive slogans without much depth of understanding.

Therefore we can fully subscribe to a statement by Robert A. Graham, S.J., writing on extremists of right and left: "This kind of tension by either group is *pathological* and does not deserve the name of 'dialogue' or 'pluralism.'" Another statement of his has however to be qualified: "There is certainly a middle road where both extremes can find reconciliation."¹⁶ Reconciliation is possible only when each group

¹⁵"Thus, we come full circle . . . as alienated traditionalists and radicalized renewalists give up on the Church" (Donahue, "Current Strategies of Change in the Church," pp. 184-89).

¹⁶In *Columbia*, June, 1973, p. 33.

changes its underlying mentality.

Notwithstanding the dismissal of the middle road as chimerical there is yet an opening for the eminently human need for dialogue, dialectic, or even tension, as also for a sound pluralism. But we must look for it, not in the fathomless abyss between the two mentalities described here as conservative and progressive, but only within the framework of the progressive mentality. For here we find a basic agreement on the direction to be taken, and on this common basis there is room for theological and pastoral disputes and discussion of policy and method. Then we have a fruitful tension between progressives among themselves, between the more "moderate" and the more "radical" progressives. But, again, a phrase such as "a middle-of-the-road progressive" makes no point.¹⁷

The conservative mentality forecloses the very possibility of dialogue and pluralism, insofar as the terms refer to more than merely academic issues. For the conservative has a closed mind which, moreover, claims to be in the absolute possession of truth, so that there is no scope for pastoral or theological disputes of any substance. The progressive, on the other hand, will welcome pluralism since pluralism is the essential concomitant of an open mentality such as the progressive by definition is said to possess.

Without much further comment, there now follows a list of contrasting dyads which indicate the various components of the conservative and progressive personalities. The list has been compiled from several studies of this phenomenon, studies which show a remarkable degree of convergence.¹⁸

¹⁷The phrase is found in John S. Nelson, *Questions Catholics Are Asking* (Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1973), p. 9. The Dutch biblical scholar Lucas Grollenberg strongly attacks the middle-of-the-road feasibility by denying the very possibility of what could be termed a "quantitative" reconciliation between the two mentalities, designated by him as Roman-dogmatical and modern-historical: "No reconciliation is possible between the Roman thinking and the modern thinking. To speak in a popular vein: You cannot say: 'Come, let us modernize a bit and drop ten of the fifteen dogmas.' This is impossible. You think either dogmatically or historically. Reconciliation between the two ways does not seem possible to me" ("Van oud naar nieuw," in *De heraut* 104 (June, 1973), 177.

¹⁸Dubay ("Renewal: Testing the Assumptions") rejects the usefulness of

It must be borne in mind, however, that not all the contrasts are mutually exclusive. Yet, it may be said that the progressive, wherever it is appropriate, has absorbed the basic intent of the first column into his own column, thus forming a higher synthesis.¹⁹ And, on the other hand, in some cases the contrast is quite rigid, as in 2, 7 and of course 9.

The three major viewpoints refer to doctrine or theory: world view, criterion for human action: morality, and the more general practical, psychological and mental attitude. The components of all three viewpoints make up what we have been calling the conservative or the progressive mentality:

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Progressive</i>
<i>World view:</i> 1. Conceptualist: Platonic world of ideas	1. Realist: concrete Aristotelian world
2. a) Static	2. a) Dynamic
b) Rigid inflexibility	b) Historical consciousness
c) Absolute grasp of truth ²⁰	c) Groping towards absolute truth
3. a) Cosmological and Theocentric	3. a) Anthro-centered
b) (Physical) things	b) (Interpersonal) events
4. Theoretical explanation (philosophical analysis)	4. Living experience (phenomenological description)
5. Orthodoxy (in sense of 4)	5. Orthopraxis.

such a list, while Haarsma ("Alternatieve groepen in de kerk") has a list very similar to ours.

¹⁹Walter Kasper, *Glaube und Geschichte* (as reviewed in *Theological Studies* 33, No. 1 [March, 1972], 148-50), in speaking of "authority vs insight, theory vs practice, office vs charisma," "seems to be saying, the first member of each dyad already contains something of its own counterpart as an inner dimension of itself." See also Gabriel Moran, *Theology of Revelation* (New York: Herder, 1966), p. 34.

²⁰A "textbook example" is Killian E. Shuman, "Priests: which way . . . renewal?" *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 72, No. 9 (June, 1972), esp. 19-23. esp. 19-23.

<i>Morality:</i>	6. a) Legalism b) External authority c) Duty: deontological d) Shame culture (Southern Europe and Japan)	6. a) Emphasis on love b) Personal responsibility in the freedom of a (formed) conscience c) Appeal: axiological d) Guilt culture (Northern Europe and America)
<i>Attitude:</i>	7. Militant and triumphalistic 8. Adaptation and "reform" ²¹ 9. Right wing: traditionalist and reactionary (Theology of Order) 10. Structures of the past: "men of little faith"	7. Ecclesia semper reformanda et purificanda 8. Renewal 9. Left wing: "liberal" and "radical" (Theology of Revolution) ²² 10. Future horizons: "men of hope" ²³

The space available here does not allow to offer an extensive explanation or proof of the diverse points of contrast. The early writings of Schillebeeckx and Novak reveal, however, that their dyads are based upon analyses of actual statements made at the beginning of the Vatican Council and, in the case of Haarsma, also on recent events of a more political-ecclesiastical nature in the Dutch Catholic Church.

It could perhaps be objected that these writers follow what a sociologist would call the intuitive approach. Statistical data derived from surveys on the conservative-progressive issue have hardly been provided so far. But if they were, the results would as heavily be disputed as those of other surveys since at their basis is often an unconscious or simply assumed intuitive idea, or worse, not so much an "objective" as an impossible "neutral" idea involving a chimerical no-standpoint starting point.²⁴

²¹John W. O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's Aggiornamento," *Theological Studies* 32, No. 4 (December, 1971), 573-601.

²²Ernst Feil, "The Theology of Revolution: A Critique," *Theology Digest* 19, No. 3 (Autumn, 1971), 220-22. Cf. Rosemary Ruether, "The Reformed and the Radical," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9, No. 2 (Spring, 1972), 271-84.

²³Cf. Nouwen's *With Open Hands*, pp. 80-84.

²⁴According to our analysis, it is the wise progressive, with an open mind

If the list of contrasting dyads seems to some to be charged in favor of the progressive, then we have to remember what we said above, viz., that this is due to one's own progressive bias. For most characteristics attributed to the conservative, perhaps with the single exclusion of the last one, would be gladly accepted by the conservative as accurately describing him, including the—to "us"—harsh charge of rigid inflexibility.

Another point merits to be emphasized again: the progressive has absorbed whatever is "eternally valid" in the first column into his own higher synthesis. Therefore one misses the point by making a reconciliatory middle-of-the-road statement, such as: "Both have partial truth." For the problem with the partial truth of the conservative is that he refuses to go further with it, which he cannot do since he regards his partial truth to be absolute. The wise progressive knows his truth to be partial and part of man's evolutionary process of many successive, and simultaneous, grasps and expressions of the absolute truth. This is the reason why he is rightly termed a "progressive," and is thus able to conserve the deposit of faith by allowing it to live and breathe: the true conservatives, i.e., conservers, are the progressives.

Parallel to our two-mentalities theory there is mention of, especially in recent Dutch discussions, "two visions of the Church," "two visions of authority." In a TV interview of August, 1972, Cardinal Alfrink declared: "I think it is evident that there are two visions in regard to the exercise of authority in the Church." The one is of

those people who wish to see authority exercised in the traditional manner, i.e., in the authoritarian style. On the other hand, there are also those who would prefer, without disputing the authority itself, to see authority exercised in a freer manner, a manner which gives room and space to those who are affected by this authority and to whom one would like to give a certain voice in the exercise of this authority.²⁵

Another Dutchman appears to echo the ideas of his Cardinal: "There are two visions of the Church: an authoritarian vision in which every-

turned towards reality, who may be termed objective.

²⁵Quoted according to *Kosmos & Oekumene* 6, No. 11 (1972), 341-42.

thing is organized from the top; and another more democratic vision in which each member wants to be taken seriously."²⁶

Yet the existence of these two visions of (authority in) the Church, although it affects Catholics directly, is not the source of the conservative-progressive polarization. The underlying cause is, again, the world view of the persons in question, which world view then results in one or the other of these views of authority. This is aptly demonstrated by Walter Kasper who at the same time places the issue in historical perspective:

The contemporary crisis of faith is only superficially a crisis of authority. More fundamentally, it results from a shift of world views. The stratified hierarchical type of thinking prevalent in earlier centuries has given way to a form of historical and critical thinking introduced by the Enlightenment. After being systematically excluded from Catholicism by the authoritarian and reactionary leadership of the nineteenth century, modern historical thinking was accepted in principle by Vatican Council II.

In the modern situation the appeal to authority that was characteristic of Catholicism before Vatican II is no longer convincing. The roles of pope, bishop and priest have radically changed, and this sudden shift has given rise to strong polarizations within the Church.²⁷

The fact of polarization, as it is mainly felt in the practical realm of the exercise of authority, cannot be denied. But the question is: how can it be explained or, more concretely, who is right and who is wrong? This paper is consistent at least insofar as it puts the blame on the conservative, understood as the reactionary arch-conservative who is unable or unwilling to read the signs of the times.

ETIOLOGY: WHY CONSERVATIVES?

The question why some people are conservative and others progressive has received an interesting formulation by the Dutch writer quoted above:

²⁶Gène Meijs, "Mag 't nou of mag 't niet?" *Kruispunt* 9, No. 5 (May, 1973), 21.

²⁷Kasper, *Glaube und Geschichte* (reviewed in *Theological Studies*, p. 148).

Why does one person choose the authoritarian type of Church, and another a more democratic type? I don't know, but it seems to be related to one's character, one's spiritual background, one's upbringing, one's creativity. I am afraid that it is more a question of personality structure than of faith.²⁸

Here is a most interesting theory as to the "negative" nature of the conservative personality: "As a transcending movement, man is progressive. In so far as man isolates his universal concepts and judgments from the transcending movement which he himself is, man is conservative." The author then continues: "This is a philosophical statement. Only then may we ask the psychological question why it is that some persons feel and think in a markedly conservative way and others in a clearly progressive way."²⁹

There is an important implication here, which deserves to be brought out immediately. If it is true that man, by his very nature, is a transcending movement and hence progressive, the fact that stands in need of explanation is the existence of the conservative person. For it is he who fails to be faithful to the nature of man as a transcending being, as a being on the move.

Psychologists, specifically those in the field of social psychology, have devised the theory of cognitive dissonance or inconsistency.³⁰ The theory can be used to explain the existence of the conservative personality. For this purpose we have to start with man's need and legitimate wish for security. It appears, however, that some persons are more attached to maintaining security than others—one is tempted to say "more" in a qualitatively different sense. Such persons, then, are the conservatives.

²⁸Meijs, "Mag 't nou of mag 't niet?" p. 22.

²⁹Berger, *De progressieve en de conservatieve mens*, p. 33. On p. 110 the writer states explicitly: "The progressive is the authentic man."

³⁰This and the following sections borrow some ideas from H. Hoekstra, "Weerstandsreacties en Pastoraat," *Theologie en Pastoraat* 67, No. 4 (1971), 362-69, and 68, No. 1 (1972), 68-80. American source material is found in Elliot Aronson, R. P. Abelson, *et al.*, *Theories of Cognitive Consistency: A Sourcebook* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), and Daryl J. Bem, *Beliefs, Attitudes and Human Affairs* (Belmont, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1971).

Conservatives, defined as persons who are overattached to security, fear to lose their present although previously acquired balance, equilibrium or level of integration. The seeming jargon of this formulation is vindicated by phrases one hears even on the popular level: the conservative feels his "security being threatened," one should not "frighten" the conservative, for this will "throw him off balance" and make him "lose his moorings."

Conservatism is therefore fundamentally an issue of an emotional order. The conservative lives with a (religious) world view and attitude that was completed by—to give some concrete instances—the end of High School or the Major Seminary, or certainly before Vatican II. He is a conservative because he fears, and therefore attempts to avoid the psychic disintegration that would follow—as a momentary phase only, in the case of the mature person—if the current changes in the Church were accepted. He lacks the flexibility and courage to go out, face reality and find a new and higher level of integration.

This is seen to work itself out in two or three different ways: There is, first, the *arch-conservative reactionary*. Here we may again distinguish two types. The *simply* conservative merely lacks the courage to accept wholeheartedly the consequences of the new insights—if, at least, he has ever attempted to acquire them. Then there is the psychologically interesting case of the *militant* conservative, often priests and lay intellectuals. The aggressive militancy of some conservative Catholics and "concerned" groups is obvious to the "wise progressive."³¹ It is a well-known psychological explanation that aggressiveness may really be a defense mechanism when it can be shown, as is the case here, that the unconscious goal of such persons (or countries) is to camouflage their own internal insecurity or disarray. They could not tolerate, so they feel, an attack on their delicately possessed reservoir of "opinion molecules."

The other phenotype is that of the merely but deeply *disturbed* and confused Catholic (of whom we said above that he cannot be

³¹The letter from Pro Ecclesia (cited in footnote 12) contains the invitation "to *fight back*" (italics as in the original). However, such diverse persons as James Hitchcock and Andrew Greeley direct their attacks mainly against what we have termed the "wild" progressive position.

properly called a "conservative" as defined here). He is truly caught in the middle. Although lack of information is a contributing factor, the obvious feature is this person's emotional upheaval caused by uncertainty and insecurity. He sees his past securities disappearing, he has no leaders who make clear and uniform pronouncements. Consequently, he finds himself in a kind of religious and therefore existential no-man's land.

THERAPY: IGNORANT, DISTURBED, CONSERVATIVE CATHOLICS

Once we have learned the make-up and etiology of the conservative attitude, the pastoral theologian is able to offer guidelines as to how to "cure" or at least how to deal with the conservative Catholic. The approach will differ according as we have to do with the ignorant Catholic, the reactionary arch-conservative, and the disturbed Catholic.

The prospects are very optimistic, or at least the solution is simple and straightforward, with the group constituting the *ignorant Catholics*. This group has recently been referred to as the silent majority, a misleading phrase since the determining feature is not so much that the group does not speak out as that it has not been spoken to. Insofar as it is not a question of apathy and lack of interest, these people are "conservative" so to speak against their will because nobody broke the bread of the new wisdom for them. The solution is, simply, continuing adult education, which is without doubt one of the most urgent needs in today's Church, both for lay Catholics and priests.

We may well paraphrase a famous statement into: "Give me an 'ignorant' but open-minded Catholic, and I will make him a progressive within an hour"—or at least a person who has a more sympathetic understanding of the changes. The Dutch Catholic Church has in this respect a splendid record of explaining new practices and doctrines. It has "sold" some seemingly drastic innovations to the so-called "simple faithful": communion-in-the-hand, churches with chairs instead of pews, inter-communion. This, incidentally, proves that it is often not the "simple" faithful who are not ready for the changes, since the "Dutch experiment" as also several American experiments have shown that lay people are less hampered by theological presuppositions than

many priests; or if we admit that Catholics in the past have been brainwashed, then we have to be consistent and say that priests have undergone advanced brainwashing.

The picture is gloomy, I am afraid, in the case of the *reactionary arch-conservative*, especially if he has a militant and aggressive attitude. Such a person must be judged to have a really closed mind, a mind hermetically shut off to any new thought. Or to use the pictorial model devised by William Glasser for the schizophrenic:³² his inner world can be represented by a heavy thick circle which does not allow for any two-way traffic with the outer world of changing reality.

The only approach which can be indicated is to practise Christian charity by not engaging in any theological discussion with such persons. This method has been seen to yield success, for there are progressive theologians who can say: "Some of my best friends are arch-conservatives"—although of course of the non-militant type. Such a negative solution is the only positive advice one seems able to give, apart from what we shall say in discussing the therapy for the disturbed Catholic about establishing a warm climate of personal relations.

³²*Mental Health or Mental Illness* (New York: Harper, 1970).

³³There has recently been a spate of writings on "Conservatism and Progressivism." From the diversified viewpoint of our classification the following can be said: James Hitchcock in *The Decline and Fall of Radical Catholicism* (New York: Herder, 1971) has been described as "a timid liberal gone sour on renewal" (Ralph A. Keifer in *Worship* 46, No. 6 [June-July, 1972], 379). Garry Wills, *Bare Ruined Choirs—Doubt, Prophecy and Radical Religion* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1972) was for Harvey Cox "a towering disappointment after its front page reviews" and should be listed among "the most unliked books" of the year (*Commonweal*, February 23, 1973, p. 477). In our classification both Hitchcock and Wills have failed to see renewal in the Church according to the perspective of "wise" progressivism. Two other books to be placed together are Charles E. Rice, *Authority and Rebellion* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1971), and John Epstein, *Has the Catholic Church Gone Mad?* (New Rochelle, N. Y.: Arlington House, 1971). A reviewer regarded it as being too easy "to write off Epstein and Rice as carping reactionaries" (Ralph A. Keifer in *Worship* 46, 380), yet it would seem that they represent what we have termed the simply "arch-conservative" mentality if not even leaning towards the hardcore, ultra-conservative attitude. Thomas Dubay, "Religious Life: The Real Polarity," in *Review for Religions* 32, No. 3 (May, 1973), 578-86, who speaks about religious communities, and Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America. The Thankless Persuasion* (2nd ed. rev.; New

What appears to be at stake with the confused and deeply *disturbed Catholics*, perhaps even more so than with the arch-conservative, are not so much the theological or moral issues themselves as the emotional reaction to them. Some "good" Catholics, having lost their past security, lack the courage, or better, the chance is not given them, to venture out into the unknown. All that is left for them is a life of great anxiety.

Since therefore the issues themselves are of secondary importance, the pastor must aim at establishing a warm, reassuring climate of a relationship on the personal level. This by itself might even suffice to make them eventually see the rationale of the changes, and it will at least remove the fear that their whole world is sinking away from under their feet. In with-it terms: dialogue on the emotional and interpersonal level is the indicated approach. This ought to be connatural to the pastor who is himself a wise progressive, since he would only put into practice what he preaches about the new theology: emphasis on the personal situation and priority of relational thinking, the unique value of the human person and the primacy of love.³³

JOHN NIJENHUIS, O. CARM.

Carmel Retreat

Mahwah, N.J.

York: Vintage Books, 1962), which deals with the American political scene, admit both the existence of two different if not incompatible mentalities along the lines they were described here. They both choose for the conservative mentality, while Dubay's descriptive evaluation is more biased against the progressive than Rossiter's in that Dubay's qualification of the progressive is couched in one-sided and "exclusionist" terms so as to make him look as the one whom we have termed the "wild" progressive.