McElroy, Robert W., *The Search for an American Public Theology.* The Contribution of John Courtney Murray. New York: Paulist Press 1989. 216 S.

J. C. Murray was very influential in the American debate about national goals and public policy from the end of World War II until Vatican II, where his notions of religious liberty were in great part adopted by the Council. Though the study interests primarily the American people, its underlying issues reemerge in every democratic and constitutional society. Employing many hitherto unpublished talks and articles, McE. has presented a clear, straightforward analysis of Murray's „public theology". Although this term was coined after Murray's death, McE. sees the main purpose of Murray's life-work to have been the insistence upon the importance of religious values in conducting the national debate about public policy. The first chapter identifies the enemy: secularism, which Murray recognized thanks to the warnings of the Popes and such thinkers as de Lubac and Maritain. „Modernity" was attempting to destroy the medieval, Gelasian balance between Church and state necessary to preserve society's good order. For by attempting to limit religion to the sacristy and the private realm of conscience modernity was rendering it ineffective to fill the vacuum of spiritual meaning and to combat the totalitarian tendencies of the secular state. Men were in danger of losing their anchoring in a transcendent order that guaranteed the *res sacrae,* the personal dignity and freedom of men in a just society under God. The second chapter outlines Murray's proposal for reclaiming the cultural order from secularism. The unifying function of common values provides the bedrock of society. In combatting technological secularism, practical materialism, and philosophical pluralism Murray appealed to the natural law tradition to form normatively the public consensus. This tradition that linked reason and morality had to be taught by the universities – and given its abandonment by secular universities, Murray stressed the essential role of religious-affiliated universities – maintained by the legal profession, and shared by the Catholic community, which he challenged to contribute to the national debate.

The third chapter deals with Murray's proposed renewal of the political order. Against the secular doctrine that grounds law in the will of the people or the balancing of various interest groups, Murray insisted that law must be based upon reason and man's sacred dignity. Indeed, since the state is to serve man, it cannot claim an independent authority. A further limitation of state power was due to the primacy of society over the state, which functions as an instrument to attain certain of society's legitimate political ends. Hence he argued that the state rested upon contractual relations between ruler and ruled. Within that greater society pluralism had to be recognized while the common good was being preserved and fostered. For the political common good consisted of a five-fold end: domestic tranquility (internal unity), peace (protection of moral standards), freedom (empowerment to do what one ought and immunity from coercion to do what one ought not), fullness of human welfare (public prosperity distributed proportionately in equality), and common defense from external enemies. In promoting morality and prosperity, however, the state's role should be the minimal necessary, and the rest is to be left to other organizations. Though the individual's claim to immunity was not totally inviolable, Murray considered it almost so in the realm of religious belief; only with overwhelming evidence that society was at risk might the government interfere with a person's religious beliefs and practices. Inversely, since religion assured the health of society by grounding the dignity of the human person, government had an obligation to recognize and foster it where possible. To support this position Murray appealed to the Founding Fathers of the United States, who wrote and thought in terms of God and the natural law before the French Revolution established an aggressive, anti-religious secularism. Thus Catholic thought, relying on natural law morality, was closer to the Founding Fathers' intentions than other views which developed thereafter, and Catholics, long considered outsiders, had to call the nation to itself. This meant a struggle against the idolization of democracy as simple majority will and as procedure without regard to the ends intended. It also involved resistance to the absolute separation of religion and state proposed by many to the neglect of and discrimination against religion, especially in public education.

The fourth chapter outlines Murray's application of natural law morality in the international order. Contrary to political „realists" like Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr, Murray held that the United States was obliged to use its power to promote internationally justice, freedom, security, the general welfare, and civil unity. He also argued for the constitution of an international institution capable of establishing moral and legal standards in regulating relations among nations and endowed with a coercive power to defend that juridical order. Communism was identified as the major menace to this order, and Murray stressed the need of meeting it not just with force but especially with a coherent, persuasive system of democratic values rooted in natural law theory. Despite all his idealism Murray remained very much a realist, seeing real difficulties yet fundamentally hopeful about men's ability to build a better world.

In all of the above McE. has shown himself an able synthesizer of Murray's thought in a lucid, succinct style. This synthesis of Murray's „public theology" deserves to be read by those engaged in the public debate about the role of religion in setting public policy. It is moreover difficult to see how a moral person might disagree with Murray's stance that moral behavior in politics should be rooted in reason. Secularists might oppose his grounding of the human person's dignity in a transcendend order, in God, but that debate must be resolved by one's reading of history and, more fundamentally, in a metaphysics. But the real difficulty of Murray's position concerns his understanding of the natural law. How can finite human reason be raised to an absolute status? And how does one distinguish what belongs essentially to the natural law from what is time-conditioned ideological baggage, best jettisoned as quickly as possible? These difficulties emerge strikingly when McE.'s fifth chapter attempts to defend Murray's method and content in the face of various criticisms. In response to the charge that Murray did not develop a theology, overlooking the power of biblical images, McE. writes that „many theologians have pointed out that the material content of Christian ethics is identical with that of the human ethics produced by reason." (150) Then, borrowing Tracy's distinction of theological audiences, he argues that in the public sphere Murray's selflimitation to natural law language was a tactical decision, not necessarily „non-theological." But the identification of Christian ethics' content with human ethics' content is a recent development resulting from the application of transcendental Thomism to moral theology. Not only is the supposition very debatable, but it also followed Murray's death. Moreover would not transcendental Thomism's vague distinction of natural and supernatural orders lead to the destruction of the clear Churchstate separation espoused by Murray, as is actually happening in liberation theology, the offshoot of transcendental Thomism? Indeed, if natural law is available to reason and each individual is responsible for forming his own conscience, does not the Church's role become superfluous? (especially so if grace is given anonymously to all, a grace elevating motivation as well as content) Individual Churchmen may speak out but only as individuals endowed with special intellectual, persuasive, or organizational gifts. Is not that the triumph of secularism?

The final chapter also attempted to apply Murray's principles to current problems of social morality. A bit too easily McE. throws Murray's mantle over his own positions on nuclear deterrence, social welfare, and public sexual morality. If pornography and homosexuality are really perversions, can an appeal to freedom (the power to choose the good) justify the state's refusal to restrict or prohibit them? There is need of further reflection and argument on these points. Murray's political theology referred to America of the '40s and '50s. Much has changed in the meanwhile. Political theology must be constantly rethought. At least after McE.'s presentation future generations will have the advantage of knowing the doctrine of J. C. Murray, a fine thinker, both traditional and creative, and not be condemned to simply repeating the mistakes of the past.

J. M. McDermott S. J.