

A New Awakening

George Weigel

THIRTY YEARS AGO, Richard John Neuhaus announced a project with a large ambition: to develop a “religiously informed public philosophy for the American experiment in ordered liberty.” Drawing on the truths of biblical religion and the rich patrimony of Western political theory, the goal was to craft a moral-cultural compass by which the nation might steer a virtuous path through the 21st century, following the victory of imperfect democracies over pluperfect tyrannies in the Cold War.

Last October, Australian political commentator Paul Kelly suggested that the hope of achieving that goal had been dealt a hard, and possibly lethal, blow by the 2016 election campaign. “Only a fool could miss the global significance of this election,” Kelly wrote:

It is a massive advertisement for American weakness, not weakness in a quantified way but weakness at the nation’s heart, rottenness at its core. Since its formation America, despite its grievous faults, has endured as a “city upon a hill” — invoking the Puritan vernacular — an example to the world as extolled by both John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. This election, by contrast, is a display of American ugliness, vulgarity, and selfishness. What nation will want to duplicate the American rule book after this event? What nation would want to follow American democracy?

And that’s a friend talking. We may only imagine what others are thinking — both those who wish to see the United States cut down to size and those who wish its demise, period.

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Since election day, Americans of all political persuasions have been asking themselves two questions about 2016: What *happened*? And *now* what? Diagnosis and prescription have been plentiful.

According to various analysts, 2016 tore the soiled dressings off a festering wound and unmasked the now-undeniable fact that we have become two nations. Some describe the divide as one between cultural traditionalists and cultural progressives; others between the economically empowered and the economically disempowered; still others between the responsible and the irresponsible. Not a few commentators think that permanent estrangement across these divides is more likely in the United States in 2017 than fluidity and mobility— not to mention civility, comity, and solidarity.

Others dug a bit deeper into the substrata of our public life, trying to parse what 2016 revealed and what might be done about it. George Nash cautioned against the rise of something never before seen in American history: an “ideologically muddled, ‘nationalist-populist’ major party combining both leftwing and rightwing elements.” National-security analyst Thomas Donnelly noted a disturbing similarity between the two castes that inhabit Charles Murray’s paradigmatic American locales, “Belmont” and “Fishtown”: Both the beneficiaries of a globalized economy and those who think themselves its victims “measure their lives in material terms”— a far cry from the Republic of Virtue imagined by, say, John Quincy Adams. Dominican theologian Thomas Joseph White made a similar point in a different key when he wrote, just before the election, that “postmodernity is an era of spiritual impoverishment and metaphysical pessimism,” both of which warp even the noblest of human desires.

The prescriptions have also run the gamut, from those that deal with surface manifestations of our national discontent, to those proposing structural changes in our government, to those addressing deeper issues.

The weekend before the election, “The Saturday Essay” in the *Wall Street Journal*’s “Review” section, written by two social psychologists, proposed that a “truce” for America’s “tribal politics” might be effected if everyone would try to speak civilly to someone with whom they disagreed: a prescription unlikely to yield immediate success, given that the cacophony in our national life became even worse approximately 96 hours after the essay first appeared.

Ten days after the electorate declared itself, Peggy Noonan suggested that “maybe things can be soothed” if “the cultural left eases up and the

economic right loosens up”: another well-intended suggestion, and one that might have worked in a less turbulent time. But it was immediately rendered moot by a months-long demonstration that the cultural left thinks the ratchet of history turns in only one direction and is prepared to be violently disruptive to underscore that conviction — a phenomenon likely to increase as Supreme Court nominations are contested in the U.S. Senate.

Jeb Bush, for his part, recognized that something dramatic had come to the fore in American public life during the primary elections in which his candidacy was overwhelmed by a tsunami of discontent: an “anger and deep distrust . . . toward Washington” by voters who “believe the American dream is increasingly out of reach” because they believe “our system is skewed in favor of the powerful and the connected.” His prescription? The former Florida governor proposed a constitutional convention to “pass [congressional] term limits, a balanced-budget amendment, and restraints on the Commerce Clause, which has given the federal government far more regulatory power than the Founders intended.”

There are elements of truth to be found in all of these analyses, and several of the prescriptions are worth serious attention. The country has indeed become bifurcated along fault lines that now seem more like chasms than temporary cracks in the façade of our national life. There is something ominously reminiscent of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s in the xenophobic nationalism and statism evident in some expressions of the new American populism. Both prosperity and stagnation — decadence, and what J. D. Vance has dubbed “learned helplessness” — are eroding the American spirit. The communitarian ethos that long distinguished the United States has clearly frayed, and not just at the edges. And does anyone really doubt that we are less noble a people as the worship of the God of the Bible has been displaced in many quarters by the worship of the imperial autonomous Self?

All of that can and should be conceded and faced squarely. Still, I think an answer to the two questions so many have been asking — what *happened?* and *now* what? — becomes clearer when we take the time to drill down into the subsoil from which the present discontents have emerged. This effort must start with three steps.

The first step is to recognize that American political culture is in crisis because our public moral culture is in crisis. The second step is to recognize that American public moral culture is in crisis because of a

false understanding of freedom. And the third step is to recognize that the false notion of freedom evident across the spectrum of American politics — although perhaps most obviously on the political-cultural left — is based on a false anthropology: a distorted idea of the human person and human aspirations.

This analytic approach assumes, of course, that democracies like the American republic are not machines that can run by themselves; democracy is not a hardware that can be run by any software. Rather, the machinery of democracy — constitutionally protected and enumerated rights, separation of powers, a robust interaction between the executive and legislative branches of government, an independent judiciary, and a free press that functions as a public ombudsman according to professional standards of probity and fairness — only works when that machinery rests on a firm moral-cultural foundation. Or to put it another way, the machinery of democratic self-governance works only when a critical mass of citizens are internally self-governing and live their lives against a horizon of aspiration that extends beyond their own aggrandizement.

With thinkers ranging from Thomas Jefferson to Václav Havel to John Paul II, I take it that an aspiration to freedom is built into the human condition. We are, as it were, hardwired for freedom. But that aspiration must be mediated through a true culture of freedom, if the aspiration is to become publicly embodied in a national capacity for self-governance that leads to genuine human flourishing.

Or, to vary James Carville's dictum during the 1992 presidential election, "It's the culture, stupid." And it is at that level that we can begin to understand and address the national crisis of political culture that 2016 revealed.

DUMBED-DOWN HUMANITY

To begin with diagnosis: Where do we find the implicit anthropology — the vision of the human person and the tacit definition of noble human aspiration — that underwrites American public life today?

While its roots go back to the 13th century and the concept of freedom-as-willfulness proposed by William of Ockham, a more recent iteration of it may be found in the 1992 Supreme Court decision *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*. There, the Court plurality, composed of Justices Anthony Kennedy, Sandra Day O'Connor, and David Souter,

grounded their reaffirmation of a liberty right to abortion on demand in a distinctive concept of freedom. “At the heart of liberty,” the justices famously wrote, “is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” Twenty-three years later, writing for the Court’s 5-4 majority in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the decision that imposed a new regime of marriage law on the entire country, Justice Kennedy appealed once again to the premise of *Casey* (as further developed in the 2003 case *Lawrence v. Texas*) in an opinion that treated the human person as a bundle of desires that are cotermi- nous with rights—desires whose satisfaction is the primary function of just government. Justice Antonin Scalia, in his *Obergefell* dissent, rightly and witheringly noted that, in Kennedy’s opinion for the majority, “[t]he Supreme Court of the United States has descended from the disciplined legal reasoning of John Marshall and Joseph Story to the mystical aphorisms of the fortune cookie.” I suggest, however, that the problem was, and is, worse than that.

For whatever one’s opinion of the abortion liberty defined by *Casey* or the marriage law mandated by *Obergefell*, what ought to concern all Americans who care about the moral-cultural roots of our democracy is the drastically diminished concept of the human person—the desperately deficient *anthropology*, in the philosophical sense of the term—that underwrites both *Casey* and *Obergefell*. That deficient anthropology reduces human aspiration to the pleasure principle, human choosing to sheer willfulness, and the human person to the sum total of his desires. There is no notion here of what the founders understood to be lives formed by “sacred Honor,” for in the Republic of *Casey* and *Obergefell*, one person’s honor is another’s bigotry, and one person’s dishonorable behavior is another person’s unjustly frustrated desire. There is no claim here that the American democratic experiment rests on self-evident moral truths, which is to say, truths that can be known by reason; for in the anthropology implicit in *Casey* and *Obergefell*, there is only “your truth” and “my truth,” but nothing that can properly be described as *the* truth. (And that, I might add, is why the legal regime imposed by the Supreme Court in *Casey* and *Obergefell* had to be, well, *imposed*: because if there is only your truth and my truth and our truths collide, only an imposition of power will settle the argument between us, for we have no horizon of moral judgment against which to settle our differences.)

This desperately deficient anthropology is not exclusively located on one end of the conventional ideological spectrum. Although its prominence in our public life is the greatest—in the sense of furthest-reaching—achievement of the cultural left, the notion of freedom-as-willfulness implied by that anthropology is ubiquitous. It can be found on the libertarian right and in parts of the business community. It has conquered most of what used to be called “main-line” Protestantism, and it has made serious inroads into Catholicism in the United States. Within American Jewry, only small enclaves of the Orthodox and the Modern Orthodox retain a notion of freedom as related to something other than personal willfulness.

In nine years, the United States of America will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Between now and then, we can begin the process of ensuring that, on its Tercentenary in 2076, the American experiment is in recognizable moral-cultural continuity with its founding. But that is possible only if we recognize now, in 2017, that that continuity has been severely attenuated, and that we live less in a democratic republic formed by the fruitful interaction of biblical religion, classical rationality, medieval political theory, and Enlightenment thought than in the Republic of Nietzsche, where the triumph of the will has led to the transvaluation of values, now imposed by judicial and regulatory fiat.

That’s what *happened* in 2016: America looked in the mirror and found, not George Washington, John Adams, James Madison, or Abraham Lincoln, but Friedrich Nietzsche impersonated by Justice Kennedy.

LIVING IN THE TRUTH

This brings us to the second question: *Now* what?

Historians debate the precise number of “Great Awakenings” that had such a profound effect on both our national culture and on American politics. There seems to be broad agreement that a First Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s set in motion ideas and aspirations that were crucial in forming the national mind and spirit during the American Revolution, and that a Second Great Awakening in the early 19th century shaped the social dynamics that were one root of the Civil War. Whether a Third Great Awakening (which some scholars claim took place in the second half of the 19th century) was instrumental in producing the politics of early-20th-century progressivism is still debated. Some even suggest that the Sixties counterculture amounted to a Fourth Great Awakening,

although its object of worship was not the God of the Bible, as was the case in the previous Awakenings, however enumerated.

The current crisis of American political culture is not going to be satisfactorily resolved by constitutional amendments (although it's conceivable that some amendments might help rebalance and reanimate an often dysfunctional and overbearing national government). Nor is the current crisis going to be satisfactorily resolved by a rollback of the regulatory state, or a return to the gold standard, or a massive public-works program, or a devolution of educational choice to parents—although sensible arguments can be made in favor of each of those proposals.

Why? Because politics and law cannot resolve America's anthropological crisis: the American crisis in the idea of the human person. Politics and law can stop exacerbating that crisis. Politics and law can stop impeding efforts to address that crisis. But politics and law cannot resolve the crisis, because politics and law of themselves cannot revitalize the cultural subsoil of American democracy from which grow the habits of mind and heart that turn democratic self-governance from an aspiration to a capacity.

What is needed to resolve the crisis is another Great Awakening.

This new Awakening will be different. While it will depend in considerable part on a renewal of vitality among America's religious communities, it will not be exclusively the project of believers.

Among the believers, Catholics will contribute to it by embracing what the popes of the past quarter-century have called the "New Evangelization," which teaches a radically different view of the human person than today's culture of the imperial autonomous Self. Evangelical Protestants—those who have not mortgaged their public witness to the transient fashions of electoral politics and the allure of proximity to power—will contribute to it by demonstrating, along with their Catholic brethren, that the life of the Beatitudes not only makes for a happier personal and familial life, but for a nobler public life, one in which the ideas of solidarity and the common good return to prominence in our public moral culture. American Jewry will contribute to it by disentangling itself from the politics of lifestyle libertinism and reminding us all that the Exodus—the idea of life as pilgrimage and adventure, guided by a moral law that liberates us from the habits of slaves and points us toward a land of humane promise—is *the* foundational image or narrative in the Western concept of freedom.

Latter-Day Saints will contribute to it by modeling the intentional communities of family, moral conviction, and generous philanthropy in which the new Awakening will be nurtured.

At the same time, the new Awakening will be a retrieval and renewal of those political-philosophical truths that were once alive in the United States, and that proved their contemporary vitality in the 1980s in Central and Eastern Europe, in what we have come to know as the Revolution of 1989. Those truths will be proposed, and worked into the texture of our public life, by non-believers as well as religious believers.

Foremost among those truths is the public ideal that Václav Havel called “living in the truth.” In Havel’s case, and that of the other dissidents who created the revolution of conscience that underlay the political Revolution of 1989, “living in the truth” meant refusing to submit to the communist culture of the lie by even seemingly unimportant acts of acquiescence, like robotically repeating communist slogans. For Havel and those who defined the liberating “power of the powerless,” living in the truth meant living “as if” one were free. Today, those inspired by Havel and his colleagues, non-believers as well as believers, will live “as if” there were truths built into the world and into us, truths that we can know by reason. For “living in the truth,” in the new Awakening that can revitalize American public moral culture, will mean recognizing that what is often described as a decline or abandonment of democratic *values* is in fact the decline and abandonment of the *truths* about the human person that are essential to democratic self-governance.

What are the truths that will permit us to “live in the truth”?

Among the most important for the healing of a deeply wounded political culture is the truth that each of us has an inherent dignity and value that is not ascribed by government but that is built into us—a dignity and value that Thomas Jefferson would have called “unalienable.”

And the truth that recognizing this built-in dignity and value discloses certain moral obligations and responsibilities, including the obligation to contribute to the common good and the responsibility of living in solidarity with others, especially those who find living their obligations and responsibilities difficult.

And the truth that to think of ourselves and others as twitching bundles of commensurable and morally inconsequential desires is not an act of tolerance, but an exercise in self-abasement that reduces us to an infantilism lethal to democratic self-governance.

And the truth that the good life is not measured solely, or even primarily, in financial terms.

And the truth that a vulgar popular culture appealing to the basest of our instincts is likely to produce a vulgarized political culture in which those base instincts dominate.

I believe that the shortest route to the reclamation of those truths is through rediscovering the truth about the human person disclosed in biblical religion, which means turning to the God of the Bible in order to grasp the truth about the human person. But that is not the only path to those truths, as the experience of both the 18th and 20th centuries proves. Thus the coalition of those who can begin the process of a new Great Awakening aimed at the healing of American political culture will be a coalition of believers and unbelievers, people “resolved to speak out clearly and pay up personally,” as Albert Camus put it to a group of Dominican monks in 1948: people who are willing to proclaim, and live, a different, nobler view of the human person than the infantile caricature proposed by the culture of the imperial autonomous Self.

THE GREGORIAN OPTION

Those of us who have been involved over this past quarter-century in the project of creating a religiously informed public philosophy for the American experiment in ordered liberty must admit, in light of 2016, that our project has not succeeded. But what failures there have been have not been due to a fundamentally flawed analysis that failed to get to the root of the matter. On the contrary, the project in which many of us have been engaged has always been based on the understanding that politics is a function of culture, which carries with it the clear implication that a sick public moral culture will yield a sick political culture. That judgment has been vindicated all too well, and the question now is one of remedies at both the political and cultural levels.

But some would even reject that. In recent years, there has been a lot of talk in certain circles about what journalist Rod Dreher has dubbed the “Benedict Option.” (Dreher’s recently published book of the same title lays out the proposal in detail.) According to the Benedict Option, political remedies to our national crisis have proven unavailing, and Christians of all denominational persuasions would be foolish to put further time and effort into trying to reconstruct American politics.

Rather, they should learn from what Dreher and others take to be the example of St. Benedict of Nursia, a monk of the so-called Dark Ages, and withdraw from political contestation while building intentional communities of virtue based on the truths that make for genuine human flourishing. The signs of the times, proponents of the Benedict Option tell us, make the task ahead clear: Abandon all hope for a political solution to what is a civilizational crisis and turn toward the construction of virtuous life in self-organized small communities. For it is there that the seeds of civilizational rebirth will be planted, much as they were when Benedictine monasteries saved the civilizational memory of the West and gave birth to medieval Christendom.

There are important truths here, and they should be acknowledged. Yes, we are in a profound moral-cultural or civilizational crisis. True, politics will not get us to the root of the crisis, and the political process is unlikely to be an agent of either cultural healing or cultural regeneration. Yes, intentional communities where virtuous men and women can lead noble lives are a worthy aspiration—and, as Yuval Levin has argued powerfully in *The Fractured Republic*, they may well become laboratories for a new politics that resists the claims of the Leviathan state and recognizes the importance of the principle of subsidiarity in democratic life. All this can be readily conceded.

Indeed, learning—or perhaps more accurately, rediscovering—these truths about the importance of community and the limits of politics are necessary to the task of reviving a moral culture conducive to freedom properly understood. That is as true today as it was two millennia ago, as anyone who ponders Matthew 22:21 and its instruction about who gets rendered what will understand. It was true in Augustine’s fifth century, and in Benedict’s sixth century. It was true in medieval Christendom. It was true in the 19th century, as revolutions swept away the old European order. It was certainly true during the murderous 20th century. And it was true in the early years of this 21st century, as Richard John Neuhaus and others reminded believers that the first public task of the Church is to be itself—the Church—not a partisan sect or the chaplaincy to a political party. Insofar as the Benedict Option embodies these long-held truths, it can be both catalyst and ally in a new Awakening.

Yet proponents of the Benedict Option would do well to rethink several things. To begin with, this so-called “Ben-Op,” at least as imagined by some, misreads the history of the second half of the first millennium.

Yes, the monasteries along the Atlantic littoral helped preserve the civilizational patrimony of the West when public order in Western Europe broke down and the Norsemen wrought havoc along the Atlantic seaboard and beyond. But Monte Cassino, the great motherhouse of St. Benedict's reforming spiritual movement, was never completely cut off from the life around it, and over the centuries it helped educate thinkers of the civilization-forming caliber of Thomas Aquinas.

Moreover, the Benedictine Rule developed at Monte Cassino inspired men like a young Roman patrician named Gregorius, who, after leaving the world of public affairs for which he had been trained, founded a monastery based on the Rule of Benedict in the Eternal City. But he was eventually called back to ecclesial and public service, and the man whom history would know as Pope St. Gregory the Great became both Bishop of Rome and de facto civic leader. And as pope, while attending to the affairs of both the city and the Church, he sent another monk, the abbot of the monastery Gregory had founded, to evangelize England; that monk we now know as St. Augustine of Canterbury. So perhaps we should think of a "Gregorian Option," in which intentional communities become the launch-pads for education, cultural and social renewal, and evangelization, rather than a "Benedict Option" misconstrued as a withdrawal from the world, its snares and delusions.

The proponents of the Benedict Option rightly criticize the way in which some Christian leaders have failed to speak truth to political power because they have become enthralled with the promise of proximity to that power. There were certainly enough examples to illustrate their point in the 2016 electoral cycle. But men and women of conviction and conscience may still be found in our state legislatures and in Congress, among the state governors, and in the administration of the federal government. They deserve more than the support of believers' prayers, offered from the safety of auto-constructed 21st-century catacombs and other enclaves; they deserve the engaged support of citizens who know full well that politics and law cannot fix what is broken in our public moral culture, but who also know that a political and legal framework for national cultural renewal must be created, at least in terms of creating free space for that moral-cultural renewal to unfold.

Christians are still called to be salt and light in the world, and to care actively for the common good. To approach politics without illusions is an imperative of Christian realism. To abandon political life

entirely is to default on one's obligations to solidarity and the common good—and, ultimately, to the virtue of charity.

A kind of parallel to the Benedict Option may be found in those thinkers who have essentially opted out of the contemporary political fray on the grounds that the United States is an ill-founded republic with a deeply flawed political-philosophical DNA. John Locke is typically the villain of this piece, and from Locke's epistemology and political theory these scholars draw a straight line to the current national moral-cultural and political crisis, as embodied in the enshrinement of the imperial autonomous Self at the heart of American democracy and the *Casey* and *Obergefell* decisions.

Although I fully share these thinkers' disdain for the debased idea of the human person that underwrites *Casey* and *Obergefell*—because, like them, I think that idea a prescription for both personal unhappiness and societal decay—the line from John Locke's individualism to Anthony Kennedy's autonomous Self seems rather less straight to me.

As Ryan Anderson and others have pointed out, the American founding was much more than John Locke, and the new Awakening being proposed here will recognize that. The American founding involved public aspects of the Puritan heritage, including its communitarianism. The founding drew on the English common-law tradition, the roots of which may be found in medieval Catholic political theory. Classical thought played its role in the founding, especially the Ciceronian conviction that personal and civic virtue and the rule of law are mutually reinforcing. So to suggest, as the ill-founded-republic theorists do, that the founding was exclusively a product of the Enlightenment is to indulge in a very truncated notion of the history of Western political thought. Indeed, it can be argued (and has been quite extensively by the Anglo-American historian of ideas Larry Siedentop) that certain ideas essential to the democratic project—the equal dignity and equal capacity for virtue of all human beings, the distinction between spiritual and temporal power, the principle of consent in governance, even the notion of “natural” or built-in rights—find their deepest roots in Christianity. The new Awakening capable of renewing and reforming America's public moral culture, and thus America's political culture, will be fed from the multiple streams that fed the founding, although forming from those sources a new moral-cultural synthesis.

Moreover, there are more than 400 years of history between Locke and *Obergefell*, and while ideas clearly have consequences for good and

ill, politics is shaped by more than ideas. It is shaped by experience. And while I hope it's clear that I do not underrate the importance of ideas in public life, I might also suggest that the experience of affluence, unmediated by a public moral culture that honors self-discipline and instills an ethic of responsibility for those left behind, has rather more to do with the contemporary state of American political culture than Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and his *Two Treatises of Government*. The problem is not that we chose the wrong founding ideals for our government, but that we've lost the moral-cultural compass necessary for our ideals to work in practice.

NOW WHAT?

Reforming our moral culture will require a short game and a long game. If the new administration manages to keep Leviathan at bay for the next four years, reins in the regulatory state, and reconfigures the Supreme Court so that it no longer functions as Leviathan's super-legislature, space will have been created for immediate short-game action that addresses some urgent issues. That short game will include a deepened critique of vulgarity and rapaciousness that does not fall into the trap of dismissing markets as inevitably corrupting. It will include a critique of the inherently demagogic character of social media and their current impact on public life, while working to develop a new public culture of conversation and debate that gets America out of the brackish shallows of demagogy and into the deeper and more bracing waters of serious debate. This short game will also include a recognition that our politics — in the narrowest, electoral sense of the term — has too often devolved into the selection of authorized poachers who are expected to bring home as much game as possible from the public game preserve. But in recognizing and critiquing that, the short game will also challenge those who now suggest that efficient authoritarianism is the answer to our public woes.

The long game is, of course, the more important and determinative game. The long game is the new Great Awakening: the rebirth of the ideas about the human person, human community, and human destiny that once informed the American experiment in ordered liberty, that can inform it again — and that must do so, if the American republic of 2076 is to stand in vital moral and cultural continuity with the American republic of 1776.

That new Awakening, as I have suggested earlier, will be the project of believers and unbelievers, and it will involve men and women of good will across a good portion of the conventional political spectrum. The new Awakening will be resisted by those for whom the sole meaning and purpose of American democracy is the satisfaction of the desires of the autonomous Self; it will also be resisted by those for whom democracy is a failed experiment to be remedied by a new authoritarianism. But neither of those centers of resistance has a viable proposal for the American future. For the Selfers are committed to an imposition of their deconstructive project that inevitably leads to a kind of dictatorship of relativism, while those flirting with a new authoritarianism will discover the lesson that the mid-20th century ought to have taught them: The messiness of democracy is preferable to the jackboot and the cudgel.

The task is to see that this democratic messiness does not completely devolve into democratic dysfunction. And that requires the rebuilding of a true culture of freedom.

In his inaugural address, President Kennedy noted that, “In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger.” That challenge was met, and freedom was vindicated, in the Revolution of 1989 and the collapse of European communism. Now freedom must be defended against another grave danger: the danger posed by a profound misunderstanding of freedom, which threatens to become freedom’s undoing.

The weapons in this new struggle will be, in the main, the weapons of the spirit and the intellect. But then, in the final analysis, those were the weapons that won the Cold War.

The new Awakening that can meet the challenge of securing the future of freedom in the face of the many solvents that now threaten it will be a multi-generational task. It will certainly not be completed in our lifetimes, and probably not in our children’s. But the next Great Awakening is crucial to the flourishing, even the survival, of the American experiment in ordered liberty, so it must be begun. And so, to revert once again to Kennedy in January 1961, “Let us begin.”