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"Znovu jsme se ujali dědictví otců... : Konzervativní politický katolicismus v USA na pozadí komparace Michaela Novaka a Patricka Buchanana", Roman Míčka, Brno 2014 : [recenzja]

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Roman Míčka,
Znovu jsme se ujali dědictví otců...
Konzervativní politický katolicismus v USA
na pozadí komparace Michaela Novaka
a Patricka Buchanana, 269 pp. Brno:
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Roman Míčka's book [We Are Firmly Holding the Inheritance of Our Fathers: Conservative Political Catholicism in the U.S.A.—Michael Novak vs. Patrick Buchanan] provides the readers with an insight into the core of the debates on North American conservatism. While in the European context the conservative current of thought seems to be unified in its entirety, in the USA we have been witnessing inner differentiation, or polarization into two opposing movements called (rather schematically) paleo-conservatism and neo-conservatism. A vague consciousness about the existence of the latter current may have been aroused by the Rolling Stones' song "Sweet Neo Con," in the meantime; however, the differentiation between the two forms of conservatism has entered our public discourse. In fact, it is no longer just a matter of differentiation: "Recently, I have noticed an unprecedented 'fratricidal combat' also between our Czech conservative streams, exactly in the spirit of the joke shared apparently by American democrats: 'What is the difference between conservatives and cannibals? [...] Cannibals eat only their enemies'" (p. 10).

The author chose Patrick Buchanan and Michael Novak as typical representatives of the two different currents of thought; however, there is another major circumstance that links the two: they both share the Catholic faith. Míčka

thus finds it important to introduce the reader to the engagement of American Catholics in the public sphere and states that the number of Catholics among the members of the Congress amounts to 31 percent, so “it is more, than the proportion of Catholics in the US population” (p. 37). The author also mentions the voice of the American Catholic hierarchy, mainly the pastoral letter of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy” (1986).

Since the fall of the Soviet bloc the divisive issue has been foreign policy, especially American military involvement in the world. The neoconservatives have been supporting American interventionism in the global backing and spreading of freedom and democracy. This activist agenda, however, has been rejected by the paleo-conservatives based on their traditionalist convictions. Besides this “export of democracy,” the paleo-conservatives have been criticizing positive discrimination, multiculturalism or strengthening multinational structures, for example, the EU, UN, WTO, at the expense of national sovereignty.

The author describes the ideological maturing of both Novak and Buchanan. Novak moved from “liberal” left-wing position to conservatism (pp. 59–71), Buchanan from neo-conservatism to paleo-conservatism. Míčka presents the different approaches of the two thinkers: Buchanan is skeptical about the easy application of democratic principles in those countries where there are no religious and cultural prerequisites, while Novak—as a neoconservative—expresses a relatively radical optimism in terms of the perspective of the global agreement on fundamental values as well as on the general acceptance of the democratic principles. As a Catholic, Novak sees the devastating consequences of moral relativism and consumer mentality which undermines the moral grounds of the capitalist system. Buchanan, on the other side, trusts the deeply rooted moral notions of “ordinary Americans” who have not adopted the ideals of secularism and hold the authentic conservative ideals, but have no chance to win over the liberal elites, power structures, and the demagogical role of the media. Contrary to an unconditional support for the state of Israel, Buchanan has criticized the “Jewish influence” in American foreign policy. Similarly, he was opposing the war in Iraq. Novak admits that Muslims have only weakly felt the “hunger for freedom,” nevertheless, such longing resides in “each human bosom” (p. 149). In fact, Novak even wanted to “convince the representatives of the Vatican and persistently referred to the new moral aspects of the fight, which revises the Catholic tradition of leading a just war” (p. 151). For Buchanan, however, the era of exceptional measures and extraordinary foreign policy of the USA should have been terminated with the end of the Cold War.

Regarding economic thought, Novak discloses socialism as a “residuum of the Judeo-Christian faith without religion” and as a “faith in the community, in the goodness of human race and paradise on earth” (p. 122), while the real practice of democratic capitalism is, morally speaking, more compatible with

the high ideals of Judaism and Christianity than the practice of other systems. Moreover, Novak praises the economic “wonders” in India and China which helped millions of people to break free from poverty. Buchanan also regards free market as necessary and desirable; however, he criticizes liberal international market, which is not bound with the loyalty to a specific nation or country.

Given the fact that Roman Mička has been a long-term expert on the social doctrine of the Church, he could not ignore the attitude of both of these thinkers to this doctrinal system. The difference is apparent: “Novak’s work actively interprets and even helps to form Catholic social doctrine; Buchanan either ignores it, or criticizes it in his oeuvre” (p. 179). This is due to the fact that Novak has been far more identified with the official line of the Catholic Church, has been loyal with the Church and with its hierarchical representatives. What Novak presents as a novelty or as something exceptional, has been the effort to formulate the “theology of capitalism” joined with the reflection on the engagement of the laics in the world as it was defined at Vatican II. The consequences of the Council, however, have been totally refused by Buchanan: “In the last 25 years, the Catholic Church has been entirely demystified [...] The holy sacrifice of the Mass has been replaced with a communal dinner party, celebrated in the local dialect” (pp. 186–187). The Church has been damaged by the revolutionary movement of the late 1960s, and sunk onto the level of American Protestant denominations and thwarted the moral capital built up laboriously over the preceding two centuries.

Novak attempts to overcome the “Catholic anti-capitalist tradition” and thus reproaches Popes Paul VI and John Paul II for being blind to the “economic wonders” in Europe or in East Asia, respectively. Nevertheless, he welcomes the encyclical of JP II *Centesimus annus* and its backing of the market economy, however, with fixed legal and ethical principles. Therefore, it is all the more remarkable that both thinkers with their respective points of view defend the current Pope Francis. According to Novak, the capitalism of Latin American type, which the pope criticizes, is still undeveloped and is characterized—among other things—by difficult social advancement. Buchanan praises Francis’s critique of the globalist form of current capitalism.

Roman Mička’s monograph about political Catholicism in the USA enables not only a glimpse into the ideological grounds of the thought of the two currents of conservatism, but also provides a key to interpreting the role of religion in North American society. In that sense, it also illuminates the specific form of relationship between the state and the Church in the USA.

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