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## The Third Way: Wilhelm Roepke's Vision of Social Order

More and more people no longer know what it means to put first things first and to think in terms of the principles involved. Consequently, only very few still have a real philosophy which separates the essential from the accidental and which puts everything in its place. We lost sight of the real ends while becoming entangled in the means.

Wilhelm Roepke  
Cairo, 1951

**W**ILHELM ROEPKE is well known in conservative circles for his work on the extra-economic foundations of the free market. But more broadly Roepke was concerned with the overall social malaise of the modern age, a concern triggered by his experience of the first World War and its aftermath in Germany. He became alarmed at the disintegration of important relationships, of those ways of life and institutions that are vital to the survival of Western civilization, if it is not to succumb to collectivism, socialism, and totalitarianism. He thought of the West as suffering from a marasmus of the body, a weakening due to self-consumption. In short, he believed that the West was squandering its spiritual inheritance.

The free market is only a part of this general concern but even here it is not mainly defended on economic or material grounds: "I would stand for a free economic order even if it implied material sacrifice and if socialism gave the certain prospect of material increase."<sup>1</sup> What mattered first and foremost were "the eternal problems of an ordered society."<sup>2</sup> In confronting those prob-

lems, he came to articulate his vision of social order.

To do this Roepke became a synthesizer, weaving together various elements into a complex and prolific pattern of thought. In tracing the main features of that thought, I shall present both his "diagnosis" of the West's illness, including some of his lesser known views, and his "therapy" for treating these ills. Finally, I will discuss and criticize some aspects of his synthetic vision.

Roepke levels several basic criticisms against modern society. First among its problems is the loss of hierarchical "structure." The dissolution of naturally hierarchical order stems in large measure from a false conception of democracy. The health of the social body depends upon an order "where each individual has the good fortune of knowing his position" (SCOT, 10). But in modern society the individual has no such good fortune. The loss of the hierarchical order has produced a morally and socially atomized system, leaving the individual without a proper place, estranged from others and without true fellowship (SCOT, 10, 11).

The first part of the hierarchical structure that succumbs to the process of disintegration is the family. The situation has decayed to the point where the family "must needs wither and finally degenerate into a mere

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common address, with the reservation that the contract can be terminated by divorce at any time" (SCOT, 15). Divorced from the ties of family, neighborhood, nature and a properly structured society, the individual is vulnerable to *Vermassung* (enmassment) and "proletarianisation."

Another force contributing to collectivism is what Roepke refers to as "Eternal Saint-Simonism" (CH, 61-63). Positivism and scientism are among the great diseases of the modern mind. His view is not unlike Hayek's in *The Counter-Revolution of Science*. But he describes the problem this way:

This faith in Science . . . in its permanent and benevolent progress, in its promise for the future and its claim to absolute leadership, in a word, that positivist, technically-minded materialistic culture of the laboratories, of mathematical functions, of the microscope and of the mere, stupid facts, this gospel which, after the pattern of French phraseology we call 'scientism', . . . has today become a world religion to which Christian as well as Mohammedan, Buddhist and Atheist have devoted themselves with equal enthusiasm (CH, 61).

It was in Paris that this new spirit first triumphed, producing positivism "with its familiar hubris and its dehumanising effects" (CH, 62). From here the evil genii spread to Germany and became united with Hegelianism and other French tendencies to produce Cartesianism, Encyclopaedists, the Ecole Polytechnique, Prussianism, Relativism, Materialism, Marxism, Utilitarianism, Biologism, Evolutionism, and Pragmatism (CH, 62). These are the forces of evil and darkness which constitute Saint-Simonism and which intend to establish "the nightmare of a veritable Hell of civilisation brought about by the complete instrumentation and functionalisation of humanity" (CH, 63).

Roepke also spends some time discussing the logical inconsistency of "relativism" which he uses virtually synonymously with "positivism." In a defense of value judgments he writes:

Relativism which holds the world of values to be out of the reach of Science shares with

Marxism in being a negative conception 'which contains itself' like the old catch of the Cretan, who declared that all Cretans were liars. . . . Relativism . . . whilst condemning value judgments in Science, is itself a value judgment. . . (CH, 75).

In other words by rendering all values relative, relativism discredits itself. Science, especially moral science in Roepke's view, is inescapably attached to value judgments. He argues that even a relativist knows, in spite of himself, that there are appropriate and inappropriate relationships to property, the opposite sex, to children, work, leisure, to Beauty, Truth, and Justice. The individual who has lost his sense or feeling for what is moral will end by seeing a nerve specialist, and a nation with too many of such people ends in revolution and dissolution (CH, 77-78). The extreme skeptic and cynic produced by this scientism Roepke describes as the "civilised barbarian, the spiritually stark naked savage, but one with a radio and a machine gun. . ." (CH, 65).

All of this leads to another factor in the marasmus of the West, namely, the problem of technology. Roepke is not against modern technology per se but he believes it has been misused, unintelligently accepted: "Wholly wrong is the idea that we should just passively welcome all that is bestowed upon us in the way of inventions through luck or some law of natural logic" (CH, 177-178). This view is a socially blind approach to technology (CH, 178); it ignores certain human factors. The uncritical acceptance of any and all forms of modern technology must be rejected. In fact he suggests "a balanced happiness outweighs all the motors, radios and cinemas in the world. . ." (CH, 180, fn. 2). This uncritical attitude toward modern technology has helped form the pattern of modern life with its huge cities, industrialization, and proletarianization, along with its *Vermassung* and its stifling centralization.<sup>4</sup> The proletarianized masses have sold their birthright for a mess of pottage. Modern technology is so highly valued that "[s]ecurity and personal comforts are rated more highly than freedom, law, and personality" (HE, 17).

Another aspect of this social malaise is the rapid increase in population beginning in the last century. This unprecedented growth amounts to a veritable invasion of little barbarians needing to be civilized and educated (CH, 135-136). Such explosive growth has contributed to "spiritual collectivization" and to deleterious changes in the economic and social structure. It has made "continuity in cultural traditions as well as cultural assimilation of the coming generations more and more difficult" (SCOT, 31-32, fn. 9; cf. 13). Sooner or later, he argues, we must have a stable population if we are ever to attain a healthy society (CH, 136).

The race between population and technology is one that Roepke believes cannot last. Failure to decrease this growth rate amounts to "criminal irresponsibility" toward future generations (HE, 44). Furthermore, it is not at all clear to Roepke that industrialization can always meet the needs of ever more people and he entertains serious doubts of the view that population growth has been the source of dynamic, industrial progress. Rather, he sees all of this contributing to the problem of "enmassment" which undermines the stability of society in that it contributes to the formation of mass passions, mass claims, mass opinions, and so on (HE, 45). It is in fact a degradation of man to turn conception and birth into a means for demanding more goods (HE, 48).

Yet even if technology could keep up with population growth, all it would satisfy would be some of the material aspects of man's existence. But Roepke asks what will become of man's non-material side, his soul and all those things which cannot be expressed or produced in monetary terms, the "ultimate conditions of man's happiness and the fullness and dignity of his life"? These things include the Burkean "unbought graces of life" which Roepke identifies as "nature, privacy, beauty, dignity, birds and woods and fields and flowers, repose and true leisure."

#### The Need for Decentralization

To restore the health of society Roepke

recommends the "deproletarianization" of the masses through the distribution of small property holdings, i.e., the establishment of a peasantry, the very opposite of a proletariat; something akin to Jefferson's "free yeomanry." This is not an argument for mere agriculture but specifically for *peasant* agriculture which "alone possesses the inestimable sociological importance" which serves as a refuge against collectivism, mechanization, and urbanization and the general "flight from the land" (SCOT, 201). As Roepke writes:

A peasant who is unburdened by debt and has an adequate holding is the freest and most independent man among us; neither food problems nor the threat of unemployment need worry him and the subjection to the moods of nature which he exchanges for that of the market and the business cycle, usually ennobles a man instead of embittering him. His life . . . is the most satisfying, the richest and the most complete in terms of human needs (SCOT, 203).

Even the industrial worker ought to own his own home and garden to allow him to produce some necessities for himself during his leisure and provide an occupation other than that of his usual work (CH, 159).

This approach is quite radical and Roepke himself describes his remedy elsewhere as requiring a fundamental reorientation, and as being in a sense even "revolutionary" (CH, 156). To this end he calls for the decentralization of property (CH, 157). He adds:

If there be such a thing as a social "right" this is a "right to property," and nothing is more illustrative of the muddle of our time than the circumstance that hitherto no government and no party have inscribed these words on their banner (CH, 159).

In this connection Roepke also suggests that some level of town and country planning will be needed. Its purpose would be to break up "industrial and habitational clumps" and to prevent the sprawling of big cities. This is not to be confused with "ribbon development" or "suburbanisation." This would be a spurious decentralization which he rejects. Rather, a genuine decen-

tralization "means the creation of fresh small centres in lieu of the big city." In the big city people mingle in an "anonymous and mechanical" sort of way instead of "close communities embracing all classes and functions and possessing a genuine community spirit of neighbourliness" (CH, 159-164; esp. 162-163).

Industry, too, can become decentralized. Here Roepke focuses on the kind of technology that is conducive to decentralization. A restoration of a balanced view of technology is required and with this perspective comes the possibility that mankind might be better off without some inventions. He recalls how much better people felt with the reduced motor traffic during World War II. But he adds we must surely recognize the advantages of railway, electricity, and bicycles (CH, 170). He believes these forms of technology can be used to aid in the decentralization of industry. The application of electricity, e.g., in the iron and steel industry might allow the small colliery to make a comeback in certain circumstances. The invention of the small transportable sawmill ("jeep-mills") would, he thought, help decentralize the lumber industry (CH, 171). Also, he believed that new developments in medicine would allow for the return of apothecaries instead of the dreary drug store (SCOT, 247, fn. 9). In any case he strives to strike a balance between optimism and pessimism; technology is not to be praised "up to the skies" nor condemned utterly (CH, 169, 170): "This seems to us to represent a realistic attitude of mind and one far removed from every kind of romanticism, from the romanticism of the cult of the machine as that of a Gandhi" (CH, 171).

One of the reasons for Roepke's belief that industry should be broken up into smaller firms involves the nature of consumer demand: "The more individual and changing the demand, so much the less suitable is big business mass production, particularly where all articles are subject to changes of fashion" (CH, 175). Big business often has the rigidity characteristic of the Dinosaur "whereas the smaller concern is distin-

guished for its greater pliability and resistance to crises" (CH, 175). Small businesses have a greater ability to withstand the business fluctuations that inhere in the free market. That size is truly efficient which survives these boom and bust cycles, and which allows the business to function throughout the entire cycle (CH, 176-177). The task, then, involves discovering both the technological and organizational possibilities or combinations which will best promote industrial decentralization in the light of sociological or humane factors (CH, 177-180).

Present industrial practices, conforming to the cult of the colossal, are depersonalizing and mechanizing. Massiveness and minute division of labor should be replaced (SCOT, 220). Of course, Roepke argues, this proposal is only for those industries that can be decentralized without significant decreases in output. But he adds:

However, even if certain sacrifices have to be made as regards immediate and measurable profitableness and technical practicability, it must nevertheless be stressed that this sacrifice will be repaid in a wider, social sense and may in the long run even redound to the advantage of the enterprise itself (SCOT, 221).

If we take certain sociological consequences into account, then even the most technically efficient form of production may be expensive for society as a whole (SCOT, 221). His attitude is perhaps best illustrated by a story Russell Kirk tells. When Roepke showed Ludwig von Mises the public garden plots in Geneva, von Mises commented: "A highly inefficient way of producing foodstuffs!" Roepke responded: "But perhaps a highly efficient way of producing human happiness."

In his later work Roepke uses the word "decentrism" to differentiate between the conservative and the liberal (HE, 228) and to describe variety and independence in every sphere of human activity, but which was not to be identified with particularism or parochialism: "the decentrist must in all circumstances be a convinced universalist. . ." (HE,

233). The decentrists' center or focal point must be God, not man. There must be a combining of the general with the particular. We must also reject narrow regionalism and nationalism, valuing variety and independence. The decentrist must avoid and correct concentration within the market. Again private property figures more prominently in the process of decentrism and smallness is vital for humanizing organizations and concerns (HE, 233, 234, 238, 241).

The family, says Roepke, is "an institution which derives from monogamic marriage and which is the original imperishable basis of every higher community" (CH, 133). And like the family the community must have a vertical or hierarchical order, one which is "directed from above and also looking up"—as, for example, in the family the parents have authority over the children. A community involves not only coordination but *sub-* and *superordination* (CH, 133, 134). Roepke, ever the eclectic, retains some feudal elements even here. He holds that it is not good for the community if everyone wants to pursue the same occupation. An important mainstay of society, he says, are those families in which profession and economic and social position are passed down from father to son (HE, 232–233; CH, 111).

The decentrist "thinks in terms of human beings and also knows and respects history"; he bases his arguments upon human nature. He holds to established principles and is more likely to be moved by a "hierarchy of norms and values, by reason and sober reflection. . . ; he is firmly rooted in ultimate and absolute convictions. . ." (HE, 229). While the centrist stresses equality and uniformity, the decentrist holds to inequality, diversity, multiformity, and social articulation (HE, 231).

At the international level Roepke recommends a Mediaeval model for nations. He cites the *Res Publica Christiana* as the kind of community of nations that must be restored. Such a community even survived in secularized form to constitute the "open society" of the nineteenth century lasting roughly from the Congress of Vienna (1814) to World War I (1914).<sup>6</sup> That order was

characterized as a free market, price and payments union (SCOT, 241) which, though not a one-world government, was so organized "as though it were a closely knit national economy" (CH, 230; original emphasis). Ultimately, though, this economic order depends on a "higher and extra-economic nature, viz., the existence of the firm political and moral framework of an international order" (SCOT, 238). Not the cooperative way of international organizations (such as the League of Nations), nor the imperial way of Charles V or Napoleon, but the Third Way constitutes Roepke's vision (SCOT, 239). The Third Way is rooted in a traditional liberalism, one which avoids the extremes or defects of both collectivism and laissez-faire capitalism, domestically and internationally (SCOT, 239–242).

#### True Liberalism

Liberalism for Roepke means the balancing of government's natural tendency toward despotism with appropriate counterweights. This is important for a democracy since it especially inclines towards tyranny: "the collectivist state has its roots in the soil of unlimited democracy" unless countered with non-political spheres, intermediate levels of social authority, federalism, self-determination and even a form of "aristocracy" (SCOT, 85). Included in his list of counterweights is the pursuit of a golden mean, avoiding the atomization of the individual on the one hand and hyperintegration on the other. We must give Caesar's things to Caesar but the rest to God, family, neighbors, and ourselves (SCOT, 91). This is the nature of liberalism.

This tendency of democracies and governments in general is exacerbated further by a sense of irresponsibility reflected in pressure groups demanding payments from the state (welfarism) and thereby undermining the moral unity of a nation (CH, 94), and in the extension of the franchise to adolescents from whom one can expect neither a sense of responsibility nor maturity (CH, 95). And related to these is the appalling lack of sen-

timent for continuity and for historical rootedness (CH, 95).

Roepke cites the Church as one of the most powerful and effective counterweights to the modern tendencies of decay provided it is free and independent of government (CH, 101). Unfortunately, the Reformation broke the universal power the Church had previously enjoyed and thereby, along with the subsequent nationalization of both confessions in many countries, reduced its ability to counter the despotic tendencies of government (CH, 103).

Closely related to the role of the Church is the other major counterweight to the state, which Roepke calls the "clerks" of society. Clerks are the spokesmen for the supra-national values that civilization must have. They must be independent from the state and form

a class of intelligent and reliable men who courageously represent these supra-national forces against the lurking tyranny of society, willing to oppose that tendency of the state to unbridled and forceful domination, and who are a living embodiment of the phrase that one should render unto Caesar what is Caesar's but also unto God what is God's (CH, 117).

These clerks would function as an unimpeachable Court of Appeal, acknowledging a justice transcending human decrees. They may be drawn from all classes of society by those who distinguish themselves by courage, a sense of responsibility, love of truth and justice (CH, 117-118). Such individuals are more frequently to be found in the middle class "whose very name expresses the characteristics of moderation and balance. . ." (CH, 118). Examples of clerks include St. Ambrose, who challenged the powerful Emperor Theodosius at the porch of the Milan Cathedral to make him perform public penance for the massacre of Solonica. Thomas More's resistance to Henry VIII is another example (CH, 119).

Russell Kirk, speaking of Roepke's "third way," remarked: "His ideas are not new, but they are put with a clarity, practicality, and assurance which other people who want to

simplify and decentralize the economy sometimes lack." And this is the light in which Roepke himself saw his work. The scholar who undertakes such a task, Roepke writes, "must realize that apart from what fresh material he is able to contribute from his own limited specialist resources, originality will lie . . . in the synthesis" (CH, xx). Such a synthesis is needed because the foundations of society are shaken. Roepke saw himself providing a much needed "sympathetic integration" for the social sciences where "Radicalism and Conservatism must be combined intelligently as in a practical economic policy" (CH, xxi). This is always Roepke's approach to the problems he confronts: balance, equilibrium, and integration. He is thoroughly eclectic, choosing valid principles and molding them into a coherent and enduring view.

Much of what Roepke writes reminds one of the Southern Agrarians and some of his experiences and attitudes parallel those of Richard Weaver. Both men reject the socialism of their youth as well as "capitalism" in favor of a third way which includes severe criticism of big cities, rationalization of industry, science, and technology. Closeness to the land also figures prominently in both views. For Roepke, a strong peasantry is fundamental to his entire program for the restoration of health to western society. Similarly, for Richard Weaver the "moral solution" is the distributive ownership of small properties in the form of independent farms, local businesses, and so on.<sup>8</sup> Weaver viewed private property as a way of providing a haven for the political protestant; it is a citadel for the "clerk": "We are looking for a place where a successful stand may be made for the logos against modern barbarism. It seems that small-scale private property offers such an entrenchment. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

Some difference does arise, however, in their respective views of the middle class. For Roepke the "clerks" should come preferably from this class because its members best exemplify the qualities of moderation and balance. Weaver has little patience for the middle class which is weak due to its special fondness for security and complacency and

because it would be moderate even in virtue. These qualities make it more the source of socialism than a point of departure for defense against collectivism.<sup>10</sup> Yet the differences between these writers may not be so great once it is understood what both men mean by "middle class" and what their respective visions of the good society are.

Roepke saw himself as a clerk. Beginning with his denunciation of National Socialism in the 1930s, he functioned as a "clerk" decrying the abuses of power and calling attention to moral decay. After World War II he also opposed the use of Keynesian methods for the reviving of the German economy. Indeed, he was rather proud of the fact that the general approach he recommended in the last chapter of his *The Solution of the German Problem* was essentially put into effect: it formed the basis of the program of reconstruction. That effort contributed toward earning him an honorary doctor of Humane Letters from Columbia University in 1954—"curiously enough since no German university had had this idea."<sup>11</sup> But in both Italy and France the essence of his program was adopted to the benefit of both countries.<sup>12</sup>

The bitterest part of his own role as clerk seems to have been that of emigré. Not only the unhappy leaving of his own country under ominous circumstances but his reception in foreign countries caused him great dismay:

And now imagine the agony that we who had left our country in disgust, knowing all that must come, had to endure through six long years, finding that the world did not stir, did not *want* to know anything about us . . . we were given to understand that as emigrés we simply did not count, even where we were not openly set down as agitators and warmongers (original emphasis).<sup>13</sup>

Such is the sacrifice a true "clerk" must be prepared to make. Not an easy task when one realizes that a lesser man who was as tall, blond, and blue-eyed—and intellectually gifted—as Roepke could have enjoyed all the favors of National Socialism. As

Gottfried Dietze reports, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* rallied opposition to National Socialism to such an extent that when the Nazis finally came to power in 1944 in Hungary, they at once announced that "the time of Roepkeism is now over."<sup>14</sup> His clerkship is further evidenced by his refusal to join the International Political Science Association; it had, as Dietze describes it, committed *trahison des clercs* by admitting communists to membership.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, he resigned from the Mt. Pelerin Society because he felt it was too secularly inclined, at least under the then current leadership.<sup>16</sup>

Is Roepke's synthesis still valuable today? From a conservative standpoint the world is still in a social "crisis," still suffering from spiritual and moral decay, and much of what Roepke envisions as both the problem and its solution is worth serious consideration. His vision of social order, his "third way," provides an alternative to both collectivism and "capitalism." Its overriding element is a classical/Christian humanism which seeks to balance conservative and progressive elements (SCOT, 1-26).

However, one may well question how successful Roepke's eclecticism is, whether his modern elements can be combined successfully with traditional ones. For example, isn't the spirit that pursues natural science the same spirit that uses its results in ways that Roepke disapproves? Perhaps we cannot expect technological research not to have its power and scope of application extended in a manner that is incompatible with the "third way." One may also question the use of technology in bringing about the decentralization of industry so crucial to Roepke's view. The portable saw did not really break up large lumber companies. Nor did trends in modern medicine bring back the apothecary and eliminate the "drug store"; nor have electric motors restored handicrafts and artisans.

But the reason for continuing centralization is uncertain. Is it because no matter how conducive a technology is for small-scale operations, it also tends to have a potential use to larger-scale industries such that the former can never replace the latter? Or have

these failures been primarily due to institutional constraints and government policies? Roepke himself calls for "painstaking research" to reveal exactly how the government through its laws, tax system, and its economic and social policies weights things in favor of industrial concentration and makes life difficult for small- and medium-sized firms (HE, 241).

Another problem raised by his eclecticism involves the difference between his technical economics and his political economics. It is unclear, for example, how one is to have complete mobility of the factors of production (which includes labor), but at the same time have a family and individual "rootedness" and tradition, or even inherited occupations. Does not modern economic theory envision a dynamic, progressive, and changing society? How does this blend with a vision of social order that is largely conservative and in some respects static?

These questions are not necessarily unanswerable within Roepke's framework but exactly how are they compatible is not immediately obvious. The question that needs sympathetic study is whether Roepke's radical synthesis is based on its own set of coherent principles to which one can be consistently faithful or whether it is merely a halfway house, an attempt to occupy the excluded middle ground between two polar positions that are impossible to reconcile fully.

To answer this question one needs a systematic study of his policy recommendations, topic by topic, as gleaned from his prolific writings. For example, one would need to collect all of his ideas on the topic of peasant agriculture; on international relations; on methods of restricting the power of government (including restrictions on the franchise); on how to decentralize industry, and so on.

But perhaps it is more important to understand the sources of this eclecticism, which apparently had three main roots. The first is Roepke's experience of the Great War. World War I was the point of departure for his professional life. He stated that he came from a generation of men who "went

through the horrors of gigantic battles on the plains of France and whose subsequent lives have been shaped by this common experience" (MA, 228). His indignation against the war was a "protest against the unlimited power of the state" (MA, 230). The war was an expression of nationalism and pride. From this came his distrust of governmental power and militarism. From army life came his hatred of "enmassment" of life, "the total debasement of human dignity in mass existence, mass feeding, mass sleep. . ." (MA, 230).

He vowed to seek an explanation for the causes of the war and to try to prevent its recurrence. This led him to study economics and sociology and since the crisis which precipitated his concern was a *world* war, not surprisingly his thinking took an international turn (MA, 228). At first he rejected "capitalism," which at the time meant for him everything rightly damnable, and correspondingly embraced "socialism" (MA, 229). But he discovered this, too, was fundamentally nationalist and militarist (MA, 229-230, 231). From this dilemma he had to grope his way "painstakingly back" to some alternative, to some third way: "I sided with the socialists in their rejection of capitalism and with the adherents of capitalism in their rejection of socialism" (MA, 231). These two rather negative views were ultimately based on his positive understanding of the "nature of man," and on the type of existence that fitted this enduring nature. That way became his "economic humanism" (MA, 231-232).

Another reason for his eclecticism was his recognition of the serious incompleteness and deficiencies inherent even in the market economy. The economy is highly dependent upon extra-economic factors: "Market economy is not in itself a sufficient basis of society" (MA, 234). In fact economic laws will not even work to our benefit "unless they work within a society that admits of the human virtues . . . devotion, charity, hospitality, and in the sacrifices which genuine communities demand" (MA, 234). Such an approach is necessarily broad and requires a synthesis of widely placed elements to articulate a vision of social order. His point of

departure for this synthesis is his belief that man is first and foremost a moral and spiritual being and his theory of political economy is, then, really one of moral and spiritual boundary conditions which are presupposed by a market economy.

The third source, and probably the most important one, of Roepke's eclecticism is his view of religion and of Christian faith. Roepke was receptive to certain Catholic views (for example, he favorably cites the Papal Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* [1931] which uses the expression *Redemptio Proletariorum*). At one point in his advocacy to "deproletarize" the masses, a leading British labor official mistook him for a Catholic (SCOT, 224-225). And yet Roepke himself was an "ardent" Protestant as Kirk describes him.<sup>17</sup> Here again one sees the synthesizer in Roepke, always striving to find an underlying harmony among seemingly disparate sources. With respect to the social, political and economic problems he addresses, he apparently felt the Christian elements that are important here transcend Catholic/Protestant differences.

Closer to the end of his career he seems to have spoken more forthrightly and explicitly on the importance of God and religion in society and civilization. As he stated it:

... the nidus of the malady from which our civilization suffers lies in the individual soul and is only to be overcome within the individual soul. For more than a century, we have made the hopeless effort, more and more baldly proclaimed, to get along without God and vaingloriously to put man, his science, his art, his political contrivances, in God's place. . . . It is as though we had wanted to add to the already existing proofs of God's existence, a new and finally convincing one: the universal destruction that follows on assuming God's non-existence (MA, 236).

For a Protestant, he writes, who holds the situation created by the Reformation one of the greatest calamities in history, he must have difficulty "finding his religious home either in contemporary Protestantism, which in its disruption and lack of orientation is

worse than ever before, or in contemporary, post-Reformation Catholicism." All he can do is "to re-assemble in himself the essential elements of pre-Reformation, undivided Christianity, and in this I think I am one of a company of men whose good will at least is beyond dispute" (MA, 236).

Roepke's eclecticism, then, is born in part by the West's disintegration at its religious core. He endeavored to pick up the pieces and weave together a new view that would preserve the best of the past and the present; a vision of order which eschewed the extremes of both laissez-faire capitalism and collectivist socialism. Instead he sought an entirely different view, a third way, which combined economic freedom with humane factors sculpted to fit the permanent nature of man. Small property owners, decentralized industry and government, a complex balancing of power, tradition, Christian faith, roots, continuity, family life, inherited wealth, human scale, critical evaluation of technology—all are part of his remedy for the crisis of the West. Of course, he had no illusions as to how his proposals would be received. They are romantic or utopian some would say, but he believed them to be practical. It had been done before and was being done to a large extent in small pockets of sanity like Switzerland, which served as a sort of archetype for his vision. The modernists' rejection of his views was a part of the malady: "Because a suggested treatment is distasteful to the very lethargy induced by the illness it is intended to cure, it does not mean it is impractical" (MA, 235). Whatever the difficulties attendant upon an eclectic worldview, Roepke presents us with penetrating social criticism and an enduring and cogently argued vision of order:

The real issue now is whether it may be possible to preserve (or to restore) a society of Free Men by developing, in the West, a working type of the market economy which is acceptable and politically possible because it gives a fairly satisfactory answer to the challenging problem of the fate of man in our proletarianized, urbanized, industrialized and highly centralized society.

It is this vast programme which my friends and I mean when we speak of the "Third Way." It is a desperate task which summons all intelligence, human understanding, goodwill and energy which is available in the present world. If we fail in this, I see no escape from collectivism and tyranny.<sup>18</sup>

1. Wilhelm Roepke, "The Economic Necessity of Freedom," *Modern Age* (vol. 3, no. 3; Summer 1959), 223; hereafter referred to as MA in the text.
2. Wilhelm Roepke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), 2; hereafter referred to as SCOT in the text.
3. Wilhelm Roepke, *Civitas Humana* (William Hodge and Company, Limited, 1948), 131-149; see esp. 134, 137-138; hereafter referred to as CH in the text.
4. Wilhelm Roepke, *Humane Economy* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), 12; hereafter referred to as HE in the text.
5. Personal communication with Russell Kirk.
6. Wilhelm Roepke, *International Order and Economic Integration* (Dordrecht-Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1959), 74-75; cf. *Social Crisis*, *op. cit.*, 237-238.
7. Russell Kirk, "The New Humanism of Political Economy," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (April, 1953), 192.
8. Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 133.
9. *Ibid.*, 147.
10. *Ibid.*, 37-38.
11. Personal communication with Russell Kirk.
12. Wilhelm Roepke, *Against the Tide* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1969), ix.
13. Wilhelm Roepke, *The Solution of the German Problem* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1947), 5.
14. Roepke, *Against the Tide*, *op. cit.*, vi, viii. Gottfried Dietze's comments here are found in the introduction to this book.
15. *Ibid.*, xi. Again, Dr. Dietze's remark is found in the introduction to this book.
16. Personal communication with Russell Kirk. Speaking of Roepke's resignation, Kirk actually states: "Its immediate cause was the expulsion of Albert Hunold from the Society's secretaryship—a feat accomplished by Fritz Machlup, Friedman, Einaudi, and others, with the concurrence of Hayek. (Roepke in 1961 was president of the Society.) Karl Brandt also resigned, and I declined to have anything more to do with the Society. Behind the action against Hunold lay various motives, but the principal motive appears to have been the hostility of the leading secularized persons of Jewish descent, within the Society, who resented the Christian influences of Hunold, Roepke, and other Protestants, and who regarded all religion as irrelevant to social concerns, and generally baneful."
17. Personal communication with Russell Kirk.
18. Wilhelm Roepke, *The Problem of Economic Order* (Lectures delivered for the National Bank of Egypt's Fiftieth Anniversary Commemoration Lectures, Cairo, 1951), 38.