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A Struggle Between Brothers

A Reexamination of the Idea of a Cohesive Conservative Movement
Through the Intellectual Life and Personal Conflict Surrounding
L. Brent Bozell

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On the afternoon of June 6, 1970, Washington DC police were called in to handle a radical demonstration that had spun out of control. An angry crowd of 200 had surrounded a building on the campus of George Washington University. One of the police who arrived at the scene later told reporters that the crowd “appeared no different to me than any other mob. It had the same appearance, the same hysterical rhetoric, the same reactions.”¹ The radicals were carrying banners and many of them were dressed in strange clothing and chanting furiously in a foreign language (Spanish) that the police didn’t recognize: “I don’t know what it was,” another policeman recalled, “but it didn’t sound good.”² Several of the most committed radicals had smashed the glass door of a locked campus building and overwhelmed the terrified security guard who had tried to stop them with mace. They were prepared to occupy the building and put an end to business as usual. When the police burst into the occupied building, the leader of the group struggled with them and (the police alleged) attacked them with a heavy wooden cross. The police subdued him, cutting him over the eye, and dragged him from the building, bleeding and in handcuffs, along with four of his followers. “The police acted, yes, brutally,” the leader’s wife wrote to her brother, “clubbing and beating up the group

¹ “‘Life Day’ Participants Charge Police Brutality,” *NC News Service*, June 9, 1970, box 101, folder 353, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

² David R. Boldt and Anne Hebal, “Police, Abortion Opponents Clash in March on GW Hospital Clinic,” *DC Post*, June 7, 1970, box 101, folder 353, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

with absolutely no provocation. ... The treatment the five got in jail was close to sadistic.”³

This type of demonstration scene raised eyebrows but it was far from uncommon in the spring of 1970, the high point of radical leftism in the United States. There had been thousands of campus demonstrations, building occupations, and angry mobs over the previous months, particularly after President Richard Nixon announced the Cambodian invasion at the end of April. A seasoned reporter would have noticed many similarities between this protest and the many others taking place during this time period. The leader of the demonstration had begun as an idealist in a more mainstream social movement, but had grown increasingly extreme throughout the radical decade of the ‘60s. He, like many leftist leaders, was the editor of a small, revolutionary publication that painted his former movement colleagues as sellouts. The publication had grown increasingly extremist, apocalyptic, and millenarian. The editors were influenced by what most Americans considered to be the alien doctrine of a foreign regime and they painted the United States as a hellish, immoral state, guilty of murder, with blood on its hands. The radical leader had broken with his former colleagues and was prepared to move beyond what he considered their armchair idealism and their naïve trust in America (which the magazine had begun to spell as “Amerika,” to emphasize its similarity to Nazi Germany). He was willing to take direct action, putting his body on the line in the name of “the poorest of the poor” and he was willing to break laws and even commit violence against what he considered to be an illegitimate state in the name of a higher, revolutionary morality. Lastly, and most significantly, he was willing to turn against his

³ Patricia Bozell to William F. Buckley, Jr., June 8, 1970, box 101, folder 353, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

country, the more mainstream social movement he had helped found, and his own beloved brother-in-law to accomplish his higher goals.

Everything about the protest scene fit the expectations of a demonstration by the New Left in the early 1970's, except the fact that L. Brent Bozell was not a New Left radical. The cause for which he was willing to break the law was not civil rights or Vietnam, but abortion. And, he was not an idealistic college student; he was a 44-year-old man, father of 10 children, and brother-in-law to William F. Buckley. Even more surprising, Bozell had spent the last two decades of his life as a leader of the conservative intellectual establishment.

L. Brent Bozell co-founded *National Review*, wrote *The Conscience of a Conservative*, and had been regarded by many as the best political hope of the conservative movement. In fact, William A. Rusher, one of the founding publishers of *National Review* noted that “in the 1950s and 60s Brent Bozell was the political golden-boy of conservatism—far more so than his brother-in-law, Bill Buckley, because Buckley was primarily an intellectual and Brent had marvelous gifts as a political personality.”⁴ Yet, only a decade or so later, Bozell was denouncing William F. Buckley and the other mainstream conservatives, because he felt they had failed to take conservatism to its logical and proper conclusion.

Bozell came to believe that mainstream conservatives were compromising the Christian focus of the movement in order to win elections. Bozell was not content with seeking conservative change within the system because to him the system was the problem. As editor of *Triumph*, a Catholic conservative magazine that he founded after

⁴ George Archibald, “L. Brent Bozell dies; helped start modern conservatism was powerful force behind Joe McCarthy, Goldwater,” *Washington Times*, April 19, 1997.

breaking away from *National Review*, he advocated the destruction of the existing immoral government and its replacement with a ‘Christian civilization.’⁵ Brent Bozell had hoped that conservatives would see him, in this action, as a martyr to the cause of ‘true’ conservatism.

Unfortunately for Bozell, his former conservative friends did not embrace this radical new path, but instead condemned it harshly. They saw Brent Bozell’s imitation of the New Left tactics as anarchy and they were horrified by his unpatriotic criticisms of “Amerika.” Even Catholic conservatives saw Bozell as out of step with the Catholic Church, which had refused to endorse his magazine or his protest. Most conservative intellectuals felt Bozell’s theocratic extremism was damaging to the conservative cause, but they were captivated by Bozell’s swift ideological transition and the estrangement from his brother-in-law, William F. Buckley. The conservative leaders struggled to understand how someone who had once been seen as a rising young conservative leader, more politically gifted than even his brother-in-law, could have come to such a bizarre place in the political spectrum.

Although this story of unrealized political potential is interesting in itself, it leads to the question of how Brent Bozell’s life was significant in the larger history of the conservative movement in the United States and what it can teach us about conservatism today? It is possible that his life teaches us very little and should be relegated to the footnotes of history. Buckley, and most other conservatives at the time, concluded that Bozell’s thinking led nowhere. After all, Bozell’s intellectual journey, from his official break from mainstream conservatism in 1969 until the termination of *Triumph* magazine in 1977, never inspired an alternate Christian conservative party, nor did he succeed in

⁵ L. Brent Bozell, “Letter to Yourselves Part II: Politics of the Poor,” *Triumph*, April 1969.

his lofty goal of inspiring a new Christian civilization. To make matters worse for his legacy, after the news got out that Bozell suffered from manic depression, many conservatives dismissed his *Triumph* theology and his June 6 action as simple madness. However, these perceptions should not be allowed to diminish the fact that Bozell was significant. It is true that he was a sort of tragic, unfulfilled hero of conservatism, but, more importantly, his life illuminates the logical inconsistencies and often unacknowledged fractures in what appeared to many to be a unified intellectual conservative movement. In fact, in some ways he was actually a forerunner to the kind of conservatism we have today; an impassioned New Right counterpart to the New Left, deeply caught up with uncompromising religion, suspicious of, and often separating itself from, the broader secular America, and sometimes, even inspired to direct action. Brent Bozell's intellectual journey has been drastically underappreciated by the conservative movement as a whole. His articles and actions were a foretaste to the direct actions of the New Right, the fractures within the conservative movement, and to the explosive potential of single-issue religious politics in the Republican Party.

Often the great narratives of American conservatism neglect the real fracture and failures of the movement.⁶ These histories repeatedly present a triumphant narrative of the rise of conservatism. This account generally presents the movement as much more

⁶ There are numerous historians who adopt this triumphant approach in their presentation of the rise of conservatism. Rick Perlstein, in his *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*, speaks about the dissention from the moderate wing of the Republican Party but present the rise of the conservative wing, culminating in the successful Presidential election of Ronald Reagan, as more or less a cohesive movement. Similarly, George Nash in *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, one of the most comprehensive history of the rise of conservatism acknowledges more dissention among the conservative ranks, but still presents the rise of a conservative Republican Party as somewhat inevitable. Of course, this perspective is not unique to these authors. I also found similar outlooks in: *Republican Politics: the 1964 Campaign and its Aftermath for the Party* by Bernard Cosman and Robert Huckshorn, *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* by Bruce Schulman and Julian Zelizer, *The Goldwater Coalition* by John Kessel, *The Winning Side: The Case for Goldwater Republicanism* by Ralph de Tolendano, and lastly, *In a Cause that will Triumph* by Karl Hess.

cohesive than reality would support. The idea presented is that the rise to power, culminating in the Presidential election of Ronald Reagan, was inevitable. These narratives underplay important divisions within the conservative intellectual movement. Arguments offered by “fringe” individuals are often dismissed in the historical interpretation simply because their criticisms were ultimately discarded in favor of the mainstream ‘fusionist’ model. Fusionism was the term associated with the effort of combining the libertarian, traditionalist, and anti-communists, factions into the conservative movement.⁷ Ronald Regan is often presented as the logical conclusion of the fusionist model. Yet, as time marched on it would appear that the seeds planted by Brent Bozell germinated and took root in the conservative movement of the late twentieth century.

The conservative movement, while ultimately successful, was actually a story of failures and fracture. This reality is captured in the life of Brent Bozell. Historians should recognize that when writing the history of conservatism it is as important to look at the schismatic and often extreme experience of Brent Bozell as it is to consider the life of the leader of mainstream conservatism, William F. Buckley Jr. It is unfortunate that no biography has been written on Brent Bozell because his criticisms of mainstream conservatism can shed some light on the underlying reasons for the recent electoral demise of the Republican coalition. The life of Brent Bozell, especially his later years

⁷ There were numerous influential individuals who would meet this fate, however, for the purposes for this paper I will focus exclusively on Brent Bozell. Fusionism was the real contribution of *National Review* and William F. Buckley, because it allowed them to define out of conservatism anyone who was not part of the fusionist consensus. This included Ayn Rand, the Old Right’s isolationism and anti-Semitism, the John Birch Society, the extreme libertarianism of Murray Rothbard, and eventually Brent Bozell’s ‘Christian civilization.’

after his intellectual departure, while full of failure and extremism, is a perfect rebuttal to the triumphant narrative of the cohesive and inevitable conservative movement.

Youth and Early Associations with William F. Buckley

Leo Brent Bozell Jr., who would go by Leo B. Bozell in his youth and L. Brent Bozell as an adult, was born January 15, 1926 in Omaha, Nebraska to Episcopalian parents. He grew up an adventurous child of the American West. His parents were Democrats, as was Bozell until he arrived at Yale University.⁸ Bozell attended a Jesuit high school where he was first exposed to the teachings of the Catholic faith.⁹ He would officially convert to Catholicism as an undergraduate at Yale. Before entering Yale, Bozell served in the Merchant Marines and the Navy in the Pacific during the Second World War.¹⁰ This experience inspired Bozell to become very involved in the campus World Federalists as a freshman at Yale, a liberal minded organization committed to preventing another world war.¹¹ He was also one of just two freshmen to make the esteemed debate team.¹² The other freshman was William F. Buckley and the two would grow to become best friends and then brother-in-laws. John Judis has noted the extent of this friendship, “Buckley and Bozell became inseparable,” Judis says, “every evening, they would meet for tea at the Elizabethan Club, or for drinks at George and Harry’s or

⁸ John B. Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 56.

⁹ Raymond T. Gawronski, “A Son of Thunder Comes to the Cross,” in Michael Lawrence (ed.), “L. B. B. Memories” (privately printed, 1997). Source courtesy of Michael Lawrence.

¹⁰ Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 55.

¹¹ Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 71.

¹² “Tryouts Enlarge Debating Squad: Yale, Harvard to Clash on '46 Election Issue,” *Yale Daily News*, September 27, 1946, page 1.

the Fence Club.”¹³ Bozell and Buckley were named debate partners and their coach, Rollin Osterweis, noted that the two “made a particularly devastating combination.”¹⁴ At the time, most people regarded Bozell as the more brilliant orator, and he would beat out Buckley for the Ten Eyck Award for public speaking in their last two years at Yale.¹⁵ Buckley devoted much of his time to the *Yale Daily News* while Bozell succeeded in being elected president of the Yale Political Union in December 1948.¹⁶

The two students inspired and influenced each other as they both quickly became big men on the Yale campus. Buckley and Bozell were promptly attracted to Willmoore Kendall, a Yale Political Science professor who would continue to have an influence on both men throughout their lives.¹⁷ As Paul Weiss, a professor who taught both students, pointed out, “Bozell initially appeared even more talented than Buckley. He was not only a better speaker, he was also a better student.”¹⁸ However, it seemed that more often than not during their time at Yale, Bozell adjusted to fit Buckley’s stance. At Yale Brent Bozell to some extent remade his life and personality under Buckley’s influence. “Even though Bozell continued to differ politically on some points from Buckley, he abandoned his allegiance to the World Federalists and became closely identified with Buckley’s politics.”¹⁹ While at Yale, Bozell also converted to Catholicism. Bozell later claimed that Buckley was not the driving force in this decision but it is highly likely that his best

¹³ John B. Judis. *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁵ William F. Buckley, Jr. to Shelby Coates, Jr., August 27, 1958, Box 5, Coates-Covington, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹⁶ “PU Elects Bozell In Coalition Coup on Second Ballot,” *Yale Daily News*, December 14, 1948, page 1.

¹⁷ Kendall, a boy-genius and former communist turned conservative, had a major impression on the thinking of Buckley and Bozell. He went on to help with the founding of *National Review* where he became a senior editor. Additionally, his natural law theories highly influenced Brent Bozell’s thinking at Yale Law School and later shaped the argument in his *The Warren Revolution*. Kendall, especially towards the end of his life, was often irritated by minor things and ultimately broke with both Bozell and Buckley over intellectual differences and what he regarded as the unequal distribution of credit.

¹⁸ Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 57.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

friend's encouragement was significant. At the core of William F. Buckley's conservatism was his Catholicism and Brent Bozell quickly adopted this approach. As Judis' biography pointed out, it was often unclear where the politics and the religion separated, as if their "religious faith was itself a politics."²⁰ The more they associated with one another the more they came to see the world in the same uncompromising way. It was clear, even then, that they were extremely ideological, staunchly Catholic, and exceedingly stubborn. Alan Finberg, president of the Yale Political Union during their senior year, noted that both Buckley and Bozell were unusual in that they "could be so fiercely ideological. Many of us wished that we could be as certain about anything as they were about everything."²¹

This conservative certainty led William F. Buckley to gain his first prominence by publishing *God and Man at Yale*; a scathing account of his undergraduate experience. In the book Buckley criticized Yale for championing collectivist economic policy, for disregarding students' religious beliefs and for losing the former religious focus of the University. *God and Man at Yale* published in 1951, a year after his graduation, was an instant sensation and it propelled Buckley to national recognition. While Buckley was writing his famous first prominent piece, Brent Bozell went on to Yale Law School, but only after marrying Bill's sister, Patricia; a match avidly encouraged by Buckley.²² Ideologically, the pairing was ideal. Like Bozell, Patricia was deeply conservative and uncompromising in her Catholicism. Buckley and Bozell were now joined not only through friendship and ideological outlook, but also through family ties.

²⁰ Ibid., 27.

²¹ Ibid., 57.

²² Ibid., 57.

In the fall of 1952, Bozell and Buckley jointly wrote a short article in *The Freeman* in defense of the Senator Joseph McCarthy. The Wisconsin Senator had become famous for making claims that there were large numbers of Communists and Soviet sympathizers inside the federal government and elsewhere. His claims were often odious and even Buckley and Bozell were doubtful of some of the Senator's assertions. Yet, McCarthy's extreme anti-communism and his staunch Catholicism appealed to the young men prompting them to print the defense. The article received such a response that they decided to expand the article into a small book.²³ It was a difficult book to write because both men wanted to be loyal to the Wisconsin Senator but also wanted to take into account the legitimate liberal criticisms of McCarthy. The controversy that exploded after the book was published brought Buckley and Bozell onto the national stage. They traveled around to college campuses winning debates against professors and student groups who disagreed with most of the book's conclusions. Despite some of the misgivings that Senator McCarthy had about certain statements in the book, he became very fond of both men.

While Buckley set off to raise funds for the start of *National Review*, Edward Bennett Williams, the serving attorney for McCarthy's censure trial, convinced Bozell to leave the law firm he was working for in San Francisco and to come help with the trial. The defense failed but Brent Bozell remained part-time on McCarthy's senate staff as a speech writer.²⁴ During this short stint associated with the Senate, Brent Bozell became very close to a conservative Senator from Arizona named Barry Goldwater. Seven years

²³ Henry Regnery to William F. Buckley, September 15, 1952, box 410, folder 204, GAMAY – Regnery, Henry, July-December, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

²⁴ William F. Buckley, Jr., "L. Brent Bozell, RIP," in Michael Lawrence (ed.), "L. B. B. Memories" (privately printed, 1997). Source courtesy of Michael Lawrence.

later Bozell would ghost-write the political tract for Goldwater that helped the Senator win the 1964 Republican nomination for President.

Immersion in the Nascent Conservative Movement and *National Review*

By 1955, William Buckley had succeeded in raising the necessary funds to launch his ideological conservative magazine, *National Review*, and he convinced Bozell to be one of the founding editors. Both men believed that at the time the country was dominated by the ideas from the left, a situation that they attributed to liberal magazines such as *The Nation* and *The New Republic*. In an effort to counter this, Buckley raised \$30,000 to launch *National Review* in the belief that the unorganized American Right could unite around their intertwining philosophies if they were given a public voice. By providing the libertarian, traditionalist, and anti-communist factions, a platform to debate their differences, *National Review* became the leading outlet for the conservative cause. *National Review*, although its circulation was initially small, was quickly regarded among intellectuals as the “voice of American conservatism.”²⁵ The magazine was instrumental in the ‘draft Goldwater movement’ of the early 1960s and it is often credited as a central reason that conservatives were able to seize control of the Republican Party. The magazine was also significant because it was within the pages of *National Review* that Bozell, Buckley, Frank Meyer, and other prominent conservatives, begin to hash out their different, and often competing, visions of conservatism. Initially, Bozell was content with the vision of fusionism espoused by the magazine and, with William F. Buckley, he championed the conservative cause for five years as a contributing editor.

²⁵ George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, since 1945*, (Wilmington: Basic Books, 2006), 231.

In 1960, Bozell decided to leave his full-time editor position at *National Review* and move his family to Spain. By this point the Bozell family already had eight of their ten children and Bozell and his wife, Patricia, decided to settle in a small town outside Madrid. The town had been the seat of Catholicism in the 17th century, when Spain was at its height during the reign of Phillip II.²⁶ Patricia Bozell described the country to her brother as “Catholicism on earth.”²⁷ This place would later provide some of the inspiration for Bozell’s intellectual change of direction by convincing him that a Christian society was not only desirable but, as he had witnessed in Spain, possible. Although Bozell had some misgivings about Francisco Franco, the right-wing Catholic authoritarianism of Spain seemed to appeal to him. Bozell did not, however, reach this conclusion immediately. During this first period in Spain he was still very much a dedicated *National Review* conservative. Brent Bozell was hoping to use this sabbatical in Spain to write a critical assessment of the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Earl Warren. However, only shortly after arriving in Spain he was asked by his friend, Senator Goldwater, to ghost write a book for him. Bozell, against the recommendation of Buckley, took up the task and although he was normally a slow writer, he wrote *The Conscience of a Conservative* in just nine days.²⁸

The Conscience of a Conservative turned out to be the best selling political tract in American history and it undoubtedly contributed to Goldwater’s nomination for President in 1964.²⁹ Kenneth Tomlinson, former editor of *Reader’s Digest* and director

²⁶ Brent Bozell III, interview by author, Alexandria, VA, December 22, 2008.

²⁷ Patricia Bozell to William F. Buckley, Jr., May 1962, box 18, Buckley Family - Bozell, Patricia and L. Brent, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

²⁸ William F. Buckley, Jr., “L. Brent Bozell, RIP,” in Michael Lawrence (ed.), “L. B. B. Memories” (privately printed, 1997). Source courtesy of Michael Lawrence.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

of Voice of America during the Reagan administration, referred to the book as “the bible of the early conservative movement” that provided “the philosophical and rhetorical framework for the building of the political movement that culminated in Ronald Reagan’s election.”³⁰ George Nash goes so far as to say that “without *The Conscience of a Conservative*, which sold 3,500,000 copies by 1964, Goldwater would probably not have attained national stature.”³¹ Senator Barry Goldwater ultimately lost in one of the worst general election landslides in American history to Lyndon B. Johnson. However, this election was extremely significant in the rise of conservatism because Goldwater’s primary victory over moderates such as Nelson Rockefeller, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., and William Scranton, signaled the first national conservative victory over the moderate wing of the party.³² It is likely that the grass-roots movement that resulted in Goldwater’s nomination would never have occurred if Bozell had not ghost-written his political platform.

The Conscience of a Conservative was written with a clear libertarian focus in order to be consistent with Senator Goldwater’s political philosophy. Yet, even at this time, Bozell was starting to raise concerns regarding the inherent contradictions of having libertarians and traditionalists occupy the same political movement.

Early strains with William F. Buckley, Jr.

³⁰ George Archibald, “L. Brent Bozell dies; helped start modern conservatism, Was powerful force behind Joe McCarthy, Goldwater,” *Washington Times*, April 19, 1997.

³¹ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*, 458.

³² Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 85.

Brent Bozell was beginning to feel that many of the other conservative intellectuals, most notably Frank Meyer and William F. Buckley, overemphasized libertarian freedom over traditionalist virtue.³³ Bozell believed this ordering of freedom over virtue was adopted because it proved the best hope of uniting the two opposing conservative factions. “This theory, which Brent Bozell, one of its critics, labeled ‘fusionism,’ sought to combine the libertarian defense of economic and political freedom with the traditional and Christian emphasis on virtue as the end of society.”³⁴ Frank Meyer, the individual most often credited for this approach, insisted that there were absolute conservative principles which could allow for a synthesis between the various factions. The most important principle was “the freedom of the person,” which he argued was, “the central and primary end of political society.”³⁵ Following from this was “the ‘achievement of virtue,’” but this could only be achieved if the individual was free to pursue it.³⁶ The fusionist approach was not designed to value the libertarian priority of absolute freedom over the Christian tradition of virtue and Buckley and Meyer “insisted that conservatives must absorb the best of *both* branches of the divided conservative mainstream.”³⁷

Despite the belief of William F. Buckley and Frank Meyer that the two strands of conservatism could coexist with equal emphasis, Bozell insisted that the libertarian focus on freedom was overshadowing the traditionalist belief in God. Buckley dismissed this criticism because he “believed that compromises with other conservatives and other

³³ It should be noted that “Traditionalist” was not always synonymous with Christian. In fact Russell Kirk, author of *The Conservative Mind*, can be seen as a good example of a non-Catholic traditionalist.

³⁴ Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 147.

³⁵ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*, 267.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 268.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 268.

Christians were essential to the welfare of the conservative political movement. For Buckley, practical political considerations outweighed doctrinal issues.”³⁸ Bozell vehemently disagreed with this view. Regardless of the electoral advantages of fusionism, Bozell believed that the artificial partnership of two incompatible strands of conservatism was not only dangerous but left the movement with nothing more to offer than a twisted form of liberalism.

Brent Bozell’s view that the conservative movement was overemphasizing freedom at the expense of virtue was not reached overnight. In fact, initially he believed that the two ideals could be compatible in American society. In the April 1962 issue of *National Review* Bozell presented the United States, and the West more generally, as “what happened when man set out to build Augustine’s earthly city.”³⁹ Similarly, in an article titled “The Strange Drift of Liberal Catholicism” Bozell argued that “the West had been ‘a vouchsafed the truth about the nature of man and his relationship with the universe’ and that ‘the West asserts a God-given right, and thinks of it as a God-given duty, to conserve and spread its truth.’”⁴⁰ At this point, Brent Bozell was more or less in agreement with Buckley regarding the need for libertarian principles in order to spread Christian virtue. However, slowly Bozell concluded that the libertarian principles were not being utilized to spread Christian virtue but instead were actually working to impede its spread.

Regardless of the scope and speed of his ideological transition, it is clear through his writings that Bozell came to his ultimate critique of conservatism after serious

³⁸ Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993), 6.

³⁹ Brent Bozell, “To Magnify the West,” *National Review*, April 24, 1962, 285-287.

⁴⁰ Brent Bozell, “The Strange Drift of Liberal Catholicism,” *National Review*, August 12, 1961, 81-85.

intellectual and religious reflection. Bozell began to use his articles in *National Review*, and later in *Triumph*, to denounce Meyer's and Buckley's idea of fusionism. In place of a fusionist conservative party Bozell ultimately called for an alternate political ideology which embraced Christian solutions.

It is noteworthy that Brent Bozell, whose conversion to Catholicism was partly influenced by William F. Buckley, would now challenge his friend's political ideology for not being Catholic enough.⁴¹ The two friends, in those years at *National Review*, seemed to agree politically on nearly everything, except the role of religion, particularly Catholicism, in the conservative movement.⁴² In the early sixties as an editor of *National Review*, Bozell was focused on shaping conservatism to include Catholic values. This personal desire was captured by the fact that almost all of his early dissents with the magazine were regarding issues concerning Catholicism.

Bozell's first important disagreement with *National Review* was over the magazine describing Pope John XXIII's Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, as a 'venture in triviality' and answering the Pope's proclamation with the quip, 'Mater si, Magistra no.'⁴³ This stand by *National Review* was the first time that the conservative movement, led overwhelmingly by Catholics, signaled to the world that it was not necessarily going to be beholden to Rome. In this case, "Pope John's *Mater et Magistra*, issued in July 1961, reiterated the Church's commitment to the world's poor and oppressed" and "a call to end colonialism."⁴⁴ Buckley believed this approach was too lenient toward the Soviet

⁴¹ Judis. *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 57.

⁴² It should be noted that there is significant literature which suggests that often converts are much more devote than those in the religion from birth. For the purposes of this paper it can be seen that Brent Bozell, Willmoore Kendall, and many of the *Triumph* editors were Catholic converts.

⁴³ The Week, "Mater Si; Magistra No," *National Review*, August 12, 1961.

⁴⁴ Judis. *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 186.

Union, because it did not address those nations trapped behind the iron curtain. Bozell, however, believed that it was right to defer to the Vatican.

William F. Buckley was a devout Catholic but his “Catholicism was rooted in his conception of God’s rather than Rome’s authority, and when the political—or even moral—priorities of Rome differed from his own, Buckley expressed his disagreement, sometimes harshly.”⁴⁵ In one such case, Buckley expressed his disagreement regarding the Church’s “stand against ‘birth control.’”⁴⁶ He claimed that birth control “is not exclusively a moral issue” and that a real solution must be found because “that old dog Malthus turned out to be very substantially correct in his dire predictions.”⁴⁷ According to Buckley, “the Catholic Church [was] busily re-examining the premise of existing regulations on the subject” of birth control, and thus contraception should be considered as a possible solution.⁴⁸

Brent Bozell saw things very differently and he wrote ‘Mater si, Magistra si!’ in response. Bozell equated the allowance of birth control with the State’s failure to “enforce the imperatives of survival.”⁴⁹ Unlike Buckley, he was much more influenced by the Vatican and insisted that conservatism was an “inadequate substitute for Christian politics.”⁵⁰ He went on to dismiss Buckley’s argument that the Church was “re-examining the existing regulations on the subject” by stating that “if the Church Monday were to abandon her teaching on contraceptives as set forth in *Casti Connubii*, I doubt

⁴⁵ Ibid., 186.

⁴⁶ William F. Buckley Jr., “The Birth Rate,” *National Review*, March 23, 1965, 231.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 231.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 231.

⁴⁹ Brent Bozell, “Mater Si, Magistra, Si,” *National Review*, 772.

⁵⁰ Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 320.

whether the Church on Tuesday could plausibly hold herself forth, either to the faithful or to the world.”⁵¹

This ideological feud continued to deepen because William Buckley was reluctant to paint *National Review*, and through association the conservative movement, with too much Catholic doctrine. Buckley even went so far as to state in the magazine that “*National Review* is not a ‘Catholic’ publication. Indeed its editor, although he is most emphatically Catholic, has from time to time been criticized by some Catholics who have reprimanded as ventures in indocility some of his positions.”⁵² Bozell, for his part, could not understand how the movement could possibly offer an alternative to the liberal approach if conservatism was so willing to relegate God to a subordinate position.

William F. Buckley and Frank Meyer started to worry that Bozell’s belief that Catholicism was not compatible with fusionism could become a liability to their conservative movement. Bozell criticized many of the other conservative intellectuals who he believed were adopting their Christianity to fit conservatism when, in Bozell’s mind, it should be the other way around. Initially, these early disputes regarding the role of Christianity in the conservative movement remained largely internal.

This changed in September 1962 when Brent Bozell wrote “Freedom or Virtue?” In this article Bozell criticized not only the movement’s approach to Catholic issues, but also the entire structure of fusionism! Brent Bozell, in this famous article, rejected Frank Meyer’s idea that the “libertarian-traditionalist amalgam, as the fusionist define it, is worth bringing to power.”⁵³ He presented what he believed to be the structure of fusionist conservatism, then he refuted its core principles, and finally he offered the

⁵¹ Ibid., 772.

⁵² Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America*, 293.

⁵³ Brent Bozell, “Freedom or Virtue,” *National Review*, September 11, 1962, 16.

beginnings of his own alternative ideology – which would be greatly expanded upon in his later years at *Triumph*.

The fusionist position, as stated by Frank Meyer, “maintains that the duty of men is to seek virtue; but it insists that men can not in actuality do so unless they are free from the constraints of the physical coercion of an unlimited state.”⁵⁴ With this logic Bozell insisted that virtue can not possibly be the highest priority because it follows only after freedom is achieved. Since virtue can only be achieved if man has total freedom from constraints then “limitation of government power becomes the highest *political* objective of conservatism.”⁵⁵ Therefore, “if freedom is the ‘*first* principle’ in politics, virtue is, at best, the second one; and the programmatic aspects of the movement that affirms that hierarchy will be determined accordingly.”⁵⁶ Bozell argued that since total freedom was impossible to achieve there will never come a point in which it will be possible to exclusively focus on the second principle of virtue. This is especially the case since “there is no superior principle that can be invoked, at any stage, against the effort to maximize freedom -- there is no point at which men are entitled to *stop* hauling down the ‘props.’”⁵⁷

Bozell argued that it was not true “that maximum freedom of choice is essential to individual virtue.”⁵⁸ In Bozell’s view, “man’s concern is simply to establish temporal conditions conducive to God-approved human action, and while leaving matters to individual choice may be useful in some instance, there is no *a priori* need for freedom at

⁵⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 21.

all.”⁵⁹ Instead, he actually made clear through his own political ideology that in many cases freedom was actually detrimental to virtue. He wrote that “freedom is hardly a blessing; add the ravages of original sin and it is the path to disaster. It follows that if individual man is to have any hope of conforming with his nature, he needs all the help he can get.”⁶⁰ Bozell began to see that government, in obstructing some freedoms, could actually be “a potential instrument” for the spread and protection of Christian virtue.⁶¹

Once the idea of fusionist conservatism as the protector of virtue was refuted, Bozell saw that there would be very little that differentiated this new movement from the previous liberal consensus. “In short, the dogma of ritualistic libertarianism is hardly less far from reality than that of ritualistic liberalism, and it presents the same kind of barriers to acquiring wisdom about the good commonwealth.”⁶² Bozell argued that in a similar way to liberalism’s embrace of the ability of man to act as God, the libertarians prioritized absolute freedom over the work of God. “The urge to freedom for its own sake is, in the last analysis, a rebellion against nature; it is the urge to be free from God.”⁶³ It is only possible to attain virtue, in the eyes of Brent Bozell, by creating an ideology which places God in his proper place; as the first principle.

Bozell wrote that “God’s purpose, if we may put it so, is twofold: to give the widest possible access to supernatural grace—that is, to magnify the Christian Church; and to establish temporal conditions conducive to human virtue—that is, to build a Christian *civilization*.”⁶⁴ Instead of working to expand individual freedoms, a Christian

⁵⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁶¹ Ibid., 24.

⁶² Ibid., 25.

⁶³ Ibid., 30.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 22.

civilization would only tolerate freedom as far as it did not undermine virtue. “True sanctity is achieved only when man loses his freedom—when he is freed of the temptation to displease God.”⁶⁵ This is not to imply that Bozell wanted to create a Christian government. Bozell specifically pointed out that he “would hope not to be understood as endorsing theocracy.”⁶⁶ However, he was advocating for the government to articulate and defend the Christian virtues of the community. Bozell believed that the acceptance of this ‘Christian society’ would allow God’s civilization to be “preserved at all cost, and itself magnified.”⁶⁷

The prolonged, though always friendly, “Freedom or Virtue” debate between Frank Meyer and Brent Bozell drew large readership and ignited discussion between the leaders of the various factions of the movement. William F. Buckley noted in a letter to a conservative friend, that “the theoretical debate between Bozell and Meyer stirred up more interest than anything we’ve done in a year or more.”⁶⁸

Regardless of this increased attention, Bozell had not entirely decided how to implement his ideological vision politically. Although he would not announce his candidacy for another year, Bozell was thinking seriously about challenging Charles Mathias, the moderate Republican congressman from Maryland’s 6th district, in the upcoming congressional primary. Despite his criticisms laid out in “Freedom or Virtue” his primary platform would more closely resemble the libertarian approach modeled by Barry Goldwater than the Christian solutions he was beginning to advocate. Bozell’s departure from the *National Review* in 1963 was made on good terms. He wrote in a

⁶⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁸ William F. Buckley to Reginald Lang, January 22, 1963, Box 26, Lacroix-Lang, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

letter to Buckley that “I have come to a conclusion which in many ways makes me very sad, and that is that I must give single-minded attention to whatever new thing I decide to do in the future, and that this is not possible while working on a regular basis for NR.”⁶⁹

It was always assumed between Buckley and Bozell that Bill would remain the intellectual theorist and promoter of conservatism while Brent would become a successful politician and put conservatism into practice. In fact, Marvin Liebman, a conservative activist and fundraiser, told of a time when Buckley turned to him and said “we can really make a revolution in this country. I will make conservatism 'shoe' (the Yalie term for being accepted, as in "white shoe" rather than "black shoe"). You handle the agitation-propaganda, and (pointing to his half-asleep brother-in-law) we'll make Brent president.”⁷⁰ It is unclear how serious these statements were, but it should be noted that this was not the only time Buckley had hinted at this particular plan.⁷¹ In 1958, Bozell lost in his bid for the Maryland House of Delegates. Then, in 1964, he ran an organized congressional primary insurgency against the well established and popular moderate Republican incumbent, Charles Mathias.

The Bozell-Mathias primary was one of the first challenges of the ‘conservative right’ against the moderate Republican establishment. It was the first real attempt to implement the conservative ideas from *National Review* in electoral politics. During his primary campaign a *Wall Street Journal* editorial noted that “Bozell has not the slightest

⁶⁹ L. Brent Bozell to William F. Buckley, Jr., May 22, 1963, Box 24, Bozell, L. Brent, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁷⁰ Marvin Liebman, *Coming Out Conservative: An Autobiography* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992), 143-144.

⁷¹ Michael Lawrence, interview by author, Warrington, VA, January 23, 2009.

chance to defeat Mathias.”⁷² This fact was true; Congressman Mathias was an extremely popular incumbent in a district where Democrats outnumbered Republicans 3 to 2. However, with the support of *National Review* and allies in the Goldwater campaign for President, Brent Bozell was in a unique position to bring the debate between the conservative and moderate wings of the Republican Party to grass-roots America. The political environment of the time, partly due to the extreme perception of Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, made conservatism “unpalatable to the ‘independent’ voter and to the intellectual.”⁷³ In spite of this political reality, Bozell challenged Mathias as a ‘true conservative’ before the term conservative was an acceptable label in politics. This campaign, born largely within the halls of *National Review*, was an attempt to transform the Republican Party. In the words of Ralph de Toledano, a leading conservative intellectual and one of the founders of *National Review*, “the battle for America must therefore first be fought to recapture the Republican Party from those whose heart’s desire seems to be to make it a pallid twin of the Democratic Party. Once this battle has been won, the confrontation of Left and Right can take place.”⁷⁴ Despite his electoral defeat Bozell seemed, at the conclusion of the campaign, optimistic about the Republican Party and he did not seem to indicate that his political career was over. In this closing letter to William F. Buckley, Bozell reflected on the state of conservatism:

In those few weeks a devoted band of conservatives, most of them young, worked feverishly and skillfully to mobilize the nation’s most talked about and written about congressional race of 1964. And I think there is not one among them who does not regard the effort as profitably spent – as the necessary groundwork for future conservative success in Maryland. Who would have thought during JFK’s

⁷² Rowland Evens and Robert Novak, *Inside Report: Ideology Over Victory*, May 1964, box 29, Brent Bozell, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁷³ Ralph de Toledano, *The Winning Side: The Case for Goldwater Republicanism* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1963), 11.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

first year that Barry Goldwater would be within an ace of the Presidency in 1964? Things are going our way, at last; and at a far faster pace than we had reason to hope.⁷⁵

After his electoral defeat Bozell decided to finish his critical analysis of the Warren Supreme Court and take the conservative fight to the branch of government he felt was most detrimental to society

Although *The Conscious of a Conservative* was the most famous and successful of Brent Bozell's books, Buckley believed that *The Warren Revolution* was Bozell's masterpiece. *The Warren Revolution: Reflections on the Consensus Society* was a thorough critique of what Bozell considered to be the unconstitutional actions of the Supreme Court under Earl Warren. The book, which was started in 1963 and finally published in 1966, was praised by both *National Review* and Buckley. *Modern Age* called the book "one of the most thorough examinations of the sources of judicial review to be found anywhere."⁷⁶ Buckley wrote in a letter to another conservative intellectual that he thought the book was "a masterpiece" and the best of Brent's writings.⁷⁷

However, by the time of the book's publication Brent Bozell had rejected the thesis because he concluded that "the American commonwealth no longer *wishes* to restore the constitutional republic," at least not the "republic of Christian believers" set up by the framers.⁷⁸ Bozell now believed that the secularization of society, the liberalization of the Catholic Church, and the libertarian focus of conservatism, were undermining America's

⁷⁵ Brent Bozell to William F. Buckley, May 31, 1964, box 29, Brent Bozell, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁷⁶ *Modern Age* book review, April 1967, box 42, L. Brent and Patricia Bozell, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁷⁷ William F. Buckley, Jr. to Patrick J. Frawley, February 1, 1965, box 35, Patrick Frawley J., William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁷⁸ L. Brent Bozell, "The Death of the Constitution," *Triumph*, February 1968.

Christian ideals. He set out to start a magazine which would champion this Catholic conservative approach.

Birth of *Triumph*

Within the Catholic Church in the 1960's there was a visible shift towards a more liberal approach. Unsurprisingly, this created tension between the traditional and the progressive wings of the Catholic community. Catholicism in America, as a result of the Vatican II council, underwent profound changes, losing much of its old conservative character. "Hitherto a monolithic organization dominated by powerful bishops, who presided over a clearly defined social community with distinctive views, it became, in the 1960's and 1970's, contentious and fragmentary, no longer united on any religious, political, or social issue."⁷⁹ Bozell, as well as many conservative Catholics, including Buckley, believed that these changes would be detrimental to Catholicism and society.

In 1965, Brent Bozell set out to raise \$300,000 to start a Catholic conservative magazine called *Future*. After the threat of a lawsuit Bozell changed the name from *Future* to *Triumph*. By 1966 he had only raised \$30,000 but even with the dire cash shortage the Society for Christian Commonwealth, the organization publishing the magazine, decided it was time to launch the first issue. Brent Bozell concluded that, despite the lack of money and the belief by many that the magazine would quickly fail, *Triumph* could wait no longer; to him nothing less than the Catholic Church was at stake. John Wisner, a fellow editor at *Triumph*, pointed out to Brent Bozell at the launch of the conservative Catholic magazine that the "opportunity here for us is of such importance that, win or lose, we must give it our all; because I think that it is very likely that what we

⁷⁹ Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America*, preface x.

do now, even losing, will have a material effect on the future of Christianity in America. This, brave Bozell, is your glory.”⁸⁰ Bozell was determined to provide a voice for the traditional factions within the Church in the same way that Buckley and *National Review* had done for the mainstream conservative movement.

It was assumed by most of the leading intellectuals at *Triumph's* inception that the magazine would advocate conservative causes from an explicitly Catholic perspective. In fact, many individuals including Buckley had been calling for such a magazine for almost a decade. Neil McCaffrey, the founder of the Conservative Book Club and a close friend of William F. Buckley, wrote in a letter to *National Review* about the desperate need for a journal devoted to Catholic conservatism: “the times cry out for a Catholic journal of opinion that draws its inspiration from the lessons of the past, the dangers of the present, and the hard reality of original sin.”⁸¹ Similarly, Buckley insisted that the conservative cause was getting ignored in the Catholic press. He stated that “I seldom feel so discouraged as when I receive letters from Catholic students who ask me to recommend to them the name of a good conservative Catholic magazine. There is no way to answer that query, because no such thing exists. It is truly appalling, especially since you consider that Catholics are really the ultimately conservative force in America – and in the world.”⁸² Buckley even suggested that the magazine should ideally be created around his best friend Brent Bozell, who he described as writing “the best political commentary I have ever seen. He is a Catholic convert – a fervent and learned

⁸⁰ John Wisner to Brent Bozell, May 11, 1966, Box 41, John Wisner, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁸¹ Neil McCaffrey to *National Review*, August 26, 1963, box 36, Neil McCaffrey, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁸² William F. Buckley to Patrick Frawley, February 1, 1965, box 35, Patrick Frawley, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

Catholic now for almost twenty years.”⁸³ Buckley was not the only outspoken conservative to endorse *Triumph*. Senator Barry Goldwater, while not a Catholic himself, saw the advantages for the conservative movement of having a Catholic magazine. He wrote in the first issue that “*Triumph* is performing a unique and vital role for the entire conservative movement. Only by having a stirring and effective voice in defense of the Christian West, can we hope to defeat our common enemy.”⁸⁴ It was believed and expected that Bozell’s *Triumph* would be instrumental in expanding the reach of conservatism to influential Catholic intellectuals. After all, the conservative movement was, at least early on, a very Catholic movement.⁸⁵

Bozell and *Triumph* initially met these expectations. After the magazine’s second issue, in September 1966, *National Review* expressed its pleasure with the direction of their Catholic counterpart: “The editors of *National Review* welcome jubilantly the founding of a journal of conservative Catholic opinion ... such a magazine for Catholics is desperately needed because most prominent Catholic journals (e.g. *America*, *Commonweal*) are tediously uniform in their attachment to the idols of Liberalism in politics.”⁸⁶ However, this conservative cohesion between the two magazines was short lived.

Only three years after *Triumph*’s birth, Brent Bozell wrote “Letter to Yourselves.” As Michael Lawrence pointed out, “nothing was more confounding and shocking than Brent Bozell’s decisive severance of himself and *Triumph* from the conservative

⁸³ William F. Buckley to Patrick Frawley, February 1, 1965, box 35, Patrick Frawley, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁸⁴ Barry Goldwater to supporters, 1967, box 103, folder 372, William F. Buckley to Patrick Frawley, February 1, 1965, box 35, Patrick Frawley, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁸⁵ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*, 91.

⁸⁶ *National Review* editorial, September 6, 1966, box 103, folder 372, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

movement.”⁸⁷ Brent Bozell, after years of serving as one of the most articulate spokesman for the conservative cause, was exposing the movement for what he felt it had become: “a revolt against God.”⁸⁸

Breaking with Mainstream Conservatism and William F. Buckley

Brent Bozell unveiled his “Letter to Yourselves” in March 1969 because after the election of President Nixon he had concluded that conservatism, as a powerful force in American politics, was dead. Bozell reasoned that conservatism was finished because for the conservatives “1) Nixon in 1968 was your man, and 2) Nixon in 1968 had repudiated you.”⁸⁹ In the 1968 election, *Triumph* refused to endorse a candidate because Bozell saw Nixon as the quintessential symbol of the similarities between liberalism and conservatism. Brent Bozell dispelled the dichotomy between conservatism and liberalism stating that the two ‘isms’ were in fact “branches of the same tree” because they were both born out of nineteenth century liberalism.⁹⁰ He went on to argue that the two ideologies were indistinguishable because both believe that “politics—the ordering of public life—can proceed without continuing reference to God.”⁹¹ The crucial aspect of the “Letter” harkened back to his original frustration and belief about conservatism; that the libertarian and traditionalist strands were not only incompatible, but detrimental to one another.

In the words of Michael Lawrence, an editor of *Triumph*, “Letter to Yourselves” “inaugurated a discourse which was the thematic spinal cord of the magazine for the rest

⁸⁷ Michael Lawrence, *The Best of Triumph*, (Front Royal: Christendom Press, 2001), Introduction xxvi.

⁸⁸ L. Brent Bozell, “The Autumn of the Country,” *Triumph*, June 1968.

⁸⁹ L. Brent Bozell, *Mustard Seeds*, (Front Royal, Christendom Press, 2001), 130.

⁹⁰ L. Brent Bozell, “Letter to Yourselves,” *Triumph*, March 1969.

⁹¹ L. Brent Bozell, *Mustard Seeds*, 133.

of its history, and which is today in my view the principle reason why *Triumph* deserves remembering.”⁹² It was not only significant because Bozell was one of the most well known conservative leaders at the time; it was also the manner in which the ideological break took place. Brent Bozell had exposed to the wider intellectual community some points of real contention within conservatism.

In 1966, John Wisner, a fellow editor of *Triumph*, wrote to Brent Bozell stating that “God is on our side. This is an idea which has born up the courage of the greatest men; and I see no reason why it should not bear up ours. I was a son of a bitch of a conservative; but I have seen the error of my ways; and I repent!”⁹³ At *Triumph*’s beginning, Bozell was not prepared to make that transition. However, after writing “Letter to Yourselves” there was no denying that his separation from conservatism had been made final. Professor Gerhart Niemeyer of Notre Dame, published in *Triumph* a response to “Letter to Yourselves” noting the importance and the surprise of Bozell’s departure:

The title and preamble of the Letter first struck me as significant. In view of much of what comes next, one might have a “Letter to Ourselves,” since you deplore with all of us the shortcomings of the “movement” of which you yourself have been such a prominent part. ...When one turns the page, though, and finds you speak of disillusionment, then proceed to trace contemporary liberalism and conservatism to the same root of modern self-centered individualism, one grasps that the title was quite appropriate, for you have written not a lament but a letter of divorce. After years of uneasiness in the company of conservatives who found their highest ideal in *laissez faire* economics and minimal government, you finally declare that you will no longer have any part of them.⁹⁴

Not all *Triumph* readers were content to watch with astonishment while Brent

⁹² Michael Lawrence, *The Best of Triumph*, (Front Royal: Christendom Press, 2001), Introduction xxvii.

⁹³ John Wisner to L. Brent Bozell, May 14, 1966, box 41, John Wisner, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁹⁴ Gerhart Niemeyer to *Triumph*, June 1969, box 59, Buckley family – Bozell, L. Brent and Patricia, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

Bozell openly argued that conservative politics was an inadequate substitute for Christian politics. *National Review* wrote a critical editorial in response to “Letter to Yourselves” which stated “we feel a great personal tenderness for the editors of TRIUMPH but we decline to accept either their analysis which we dismiss as morbid; or their remedies, which are angelistic.”⁹⁵ *National Review* went on to argue in defense of their conservatism stating, “we have got, in America, what we have got. It is not what we would have, but neither is it as bad as what we might have. To dismiss even contemporary America as one vast plot against the survival of our eternal souls is Manichean and boring.”⁹⁶ Buckley and *National Review* would not stand by as the fusionist approach that was finally winning elections was challenged from the very right of the traditionalist wing. Their critical response, however, was not without an equally piercing rebuttal:

NR is evanescing. One feels it in their bones. This magazine played an important role in our recent history, played it brilliantly and courageously; it tore into and joyfully exploded many of the myths of the reigning liberalism even before history did. But now history has completed that job and is moving on to other things, leaving NR to run through its fingers week after week, now fretfully, now hopefully, the evidence of “what we have got.” We at TRIUMPH reciprocate the personal tenderness sent down from New York; and professional tenderness, I suppose, is what one must feel for what they have got.⁹⁷

This back and forth between the magazines, and on a more personal level between Buckley and Bozell, is suggestive of their total unwillingness to compromise in their divergent interpretations of conservatism. Brent Bozell’s vision was uncompromising. Political expediency meant nothing to him. There was such a clear purpose in what he

⁹⁵ *National Review to Triumph*, June 1969, box 59, Buckley family – Bozell, L. Brent and Patricia, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁹⁶ *National Review to Triumph*, June 1969, box 59, Buckley family – Bozell, L. Brent and Patricia, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁹⁷ *Triumph* editorial, June 1969, box 59, Buckley family – Bozell, L. Brent and Patricia, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

believed that when he tackled something he could do it with utter brio because of the supreme confidence in the righteousness of what he was doing.⁹⁸ Despite a twenty-five year friendship and the family relation between Brent Bozell and William Buckley, neither could overlook the challenges that the other presented to their ideology. Both men would for the rest of their lives attempt to mend their friendship but the intellectual differences created too wide a schism to cross.⁹⁹

Individuals who knew Buckley and Bozell often wished that the two could see the validity in each other's arguments. Neil McCaffrey, one of their most articulate friends, wrote in a letter to Brent Bozell that "my premise with you is that we shouldn't turn away while the barbarians sack the city. My premise with Bill is that the Barbarians are sacking the city, so it is late for speeches in the forum."¹⁰⁰ McCaffrey recognized that Bozell raised some criticisms regarding conservatism that needed fixing but while he believed Buckley's stubborn continuation with 'fusionist conservatism' was misguided, he felt the same way about Bozell's total retreat from the movement. McCaffrey agreed with Bozell that in order to save conservatism it was necessary to acknowledge God's role in the movement. But he also believed it was important not to retreat into Christian isolation at the expense of America. This outlook is captured in another letter from McCaffrey to Bozell. He states that while there are ways in which conservatism and the Catholic church are "whoring after American liberalism. Why this means we should desert *traditional* American values – the conservative values – eludes me."¹⁰¹ McCaffrey

⁹⁸ Brent Bozell III, interview by author, Alexandria, VA, December 22, 2008.

⁹⁹ Brent Bozell III, interview by author, Alexandria, VA, December 22, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ Neil McCaffrey to L. Brent Bozell, December 19, 1967, box 42, Bozell, L. Brent and Patricia, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹⁰¹ Neil McCaffrey to L. Brent Bozell, December 19, 1967, box 42, Bozell, L. Brent and Patricia, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

could see that the all or nothing approach rendered his ideas unacceptable to the majority of American people and thus marginalized Bozell. “You are giving away too much. You are saying that Liberalism *is* Americanism. Don’t surrender your country so easily.”¹⁰² McCaffrey agreed with Bozell that for conservatism to be successful the leading intellectuals like Buckley needed to move “beyond politics.”¹⁰³ However, at the same time Bozell needed to reign in his isolating rhetoric because, in McCaffrey’s view, it was impossible to solve the problem by declaring war on one’s own country. In different ways, *National Review* and *Triumph* were failing to offer solutions to the problems they were diagnosing in society. “We mustn’t try to get off cheap. Getting off cheap is pretending that Nixon is all. Getting off cheap is also retreating to the wilderness. I guess what I am saying is that there has to be a middle ground between the Republican Party and the reign of the saints.”¹⁰⁴

Despite the warnings from McCaffrey and others, Brent Bozell and *Triumph* continued to move further from *National Review*, mainstream conservatism, and the American public. The common belief among conservative intellectuals in the 1960s and 70s was that western civilization was collapsing. It had lost its ideals, creating an environment which encouraged revolutionary thinking. This belief encouraged individuals such as Bozell to refuse compromise for fear of a similar fate. The rise of feminism, civil rights, the sexual revolution, and secularism, all convinced Bozell that the existing political order had broken down and it was necessary to call upon the higher

¹⁰² Neil McCaffrey to L. Brent Bozell, December 19, 1967, box 42, Bozell, L. Brent and Patricia, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹⁰³ Neil McCaffrey to L. Brent Bozell, August 26, 1970, box 101, folder 353, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹⁰⁴ Neil McCaffrey to L. Brent Bozell, August 26, 1970, box 101, folder 353, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

authority of Catholicism.

Radicalism and Breakdown

Michael Lawrence, a former editor at *Triumph*, in an interview explained this shift by noting the differences that the editors of *Triumph* had with their counterparts at *National Review*. These differences developed despite both sets of individuals being very staunchly conservative and most of them close friends. Most of *Triumph*'s founders were former *National Review* contributors and the magazines, at least early on, shared donor lists and resources. Lawrence pointed out, however, that even in the early days of the magazine there were two ways in which *Triumph* differed seriously from *National Review*. The first difference was the focus on Catholic issues. The second, and more notable difference, “was that from the beginning there was always a disposition among the people who formed the intellectual nexus of *Triumph* to want to be radical. Not to be stodgy conservatives but to be radical conservatives and to question some of the piety of the unspoken acceptance of secularism.”¹⁰⁵ One of the early examples of this radicalism was dispelling the assumption, held especially by Catholic conservatives, that there was an unbroken line of succession from the Catholic tradition of the West and the America of today.¹⁰⁶ Once the editors of *Triumph* concluded that America was not founded as a fundamentally Christian nation, there was no room left to defend the existing government structure or to defend the conservative proposals put forth to strengthen it. For Bozell, from its origin America was un-Christian and had to be completely remade if the nation was going to avoid collapse. “*Triumph*'s politics became theocratic rather than

¹⁰⁵ Michael Lawrence, interview by author, Warrington, VA, January 23, 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Lawrence Interview by author, Warrington, VA, January 23, 2009.

conservative, with Bozell denouncing America and its constitutional tradition.”¹⁰⁷

Brent Bozell did not envision such a clear cut departure from American conservatism at the birth of *Triumph*. In fact, some of the other editors reached this radical conclusion much earlier than Bozell. For example, right after the magazine’s conception John Wisner wrote to Bozell . “To think that we can move the Catholic Church without first moving the secular society under which it lies crushed is vain. This is why we have to attack the government.”¹⁰⁸ This anti-statist course drew fire not only from the political conservative ranks but also from many of the Catholic conservative readers. Both groups were staunchly patriotic and both groups wanted to protect, at least, the better aspects of the existing order.

Bozell and the other *Triumph* editors came to view their magazine’s endeavor as more than expanding subscription rolls. They were responding to a higher calling. As the *Triumph* editors saw the situation, they were not in the business to make money but rather to spread the ‘truth,’ and subscription cancellations and harsh editorials were insignificant to the larger mission. In a response letter to one of *Triumph*’s angry readers Bozell captured this outlook when he stated that “we do not rejoice in the departures TRIUMPH is making from conventional conservatism in its critique of the social order, for we too are patriots and hold the usual prejudices in favor of the fatherland. But our calling is to assert Christianity, not Americanism.”¹⁰⁹ For Bozell the fight was no longer between left and right, it was now against the entire existing American social order.

¹⁰⁷ Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 319.

¹⁰⁸ John Wisner to L. Brent Bozell, March 26, 1966, John Wisner, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹⁰⁹ L. Brent Bozell to Neil McCaffrey, December 14, 1967, box 42, Bozell, L. Brent and Patricia, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

This extremely radical outlook was partially influenced by Bozell's experiences in Spain. As one of Bozell's sons recalled, for his father Spanish Catholicism was close to perfection. It was a country that lived its Catholicism in every way, whether culturally or politically, Catholicism was not allocated only to Sundays. His experience in Spain inspired Bozell to advocate for that type of culture in America.¹¹⁰ With the start of the magazine this connection with Spanish Catholicism did not diminish. The Society for the Christian Commonwealth sponsored summer Christian workshops in Spain during the *Triumph* years. Additionally, most of the early pro-life activities undertaken by Bozell and his supporters were associated with the Carlist tradition. The Carlist faction was a red-beret wearing conservative clerical movement in Spain dating from the 1830s that wanted to restore the line of monarchical succession interrupted by Ferdinand VIII.¹¹¹ Throughout *Triumph's* history the magazine was criticized for attempting to infuse America with Spanish Catholicism. Then with the legalization of abortion laws in America *Triumph* concluded that regardless of its influences the United States could not be saved and the magazine officially severed its ties with America. Disagreement on this same issue also resulted in Brent Bozell and William F. Buckley officially severing their personal ties with each other.

Brent Bozell regarded abortion as absolute murder and refused to support the conservative movement and the American government as long as they did not believe similarly. Buckley did not favor abortion, but he refused to go as far as Bozell in defining it as murder. After stating this belief in *National Review* Bozell wrote a furious response to the magazine as well as Buckley himself, stating that "William F. Buckley's

¹¹⁰ Brent Bozell III, interview by author, Alexandria, VA, December 22, 2008

¹¹¹ Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 318.

comments on abortion would serve equally well to legalize euthanasia or genocide,” and his position is “outrageous and gratuitously harmful to the Church.”¹¹² Buckley was equally angered over the issue and wrote in his book *Cruising Speed* that on the point of abortion “I have become estranged from Brent Bozell, ...the whole subject weighs heavily, and for once I find Catholics to the right of me, notwithstanding my own conviction that abortion is gravely, tragically wrong.”¹¹³

It was the issue of abortion that motivated Brent Bozell to write “The Confessional Tribe,” in July 1970. This article altered the direction of *Triumph* from one inspiring social change in America to one of a united Christian isolation. In a letter to her brother, Patricia Bozell captured this sentiment writing:

I don't blame America any more than I blame the rest of the world, but I can no longer love her. Right up until yesterday, despite her weakness and moral disintegration, I could still love her. No more. I won't make the easy transition into hate; but to me, now, America is a country like, say, Peru or Algiers. Intellectually I've rejected the notion of nationhood as a social concept. I think history would bear me out, seen in terms of Christianity.¹¹⁴

This was the outlook of most of the editors at *Triumph*. Bozell would say in “The Confessional Tribe” that the possibility of Catholics turning “America into a Catholic country was never more than a bigot's fantasy for the simple reason that the highest public ambition of American Catholics was to be Americans.”¹¹⁵ He concluded that America was not a “Christian country” and thus the priority of this new ‘Tribe’ would not be “to reform the American system. It is not to destroy the American system. The

¹¹² L. Brent Bozell to William F. Buckley, April 4, 1966, box 38, L. Brent Bozell, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹¹³ Charles Lam Markmann, *The Buckley: A Family Examined* (New York, William Morrow & Company, 1973) 144.

¹¹⁴ Patricia Bozell to William F. Buckley, February 24, 1970, box 101, folder 353, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹¹⁵ L. Brent Bozell, “The Confessional Tribe,” *Triumph*, July 1970.

movement's purpose is to be the Christian system."¹¹⁶ Bozell was calling for Christians, specifically Catholics, to create a nation within a nation because the sins of America could no longer be tolerated.

As *Triumph* became increasingly radical it lost readership, finances, and influence. As early as 1970 *Triumph* was already bleeding subscriptions. In a letter to Brent Bozell, the finance director, Donald McClane, wrote "it is difficult to see how we can continue publication beyond the coming summer months. We had counted heavily on a response to our fund appeal, at least equal to last year's, but this has not materialized – perhaps *Triumph's* uncompromising Christianity is becoming too great a pressure for some of our readers in the moral climate of today's society."¹¹⁷ It was not that the readers disliked everything *Triumph* advocated. As Michael Lawrence noted, most of the readers were interested in specific issues facing the Catholic Church and, on the whole, they were pleased with *Triumph's* coverage in this area.¹¹⁸ However, "for most Catholics conservatives defense of and loyalty to the nation was paramount, and the nation-denying language of 'The Christian Tribe' alienated these political supporters."¹¹⁹ At its peak *Triumph* had 30,000 subscribers. By 1974, three years before the magazines final collapse, readership was down to 5,000.¹²⁰ The financial implications of this fall in readership was not a chief concern, however, the decreased influence in the conservative

¹¹⁶ L. Brent Bozell, "The Confessional Tribe," *Triumph*, July 1970.

¹¹⁷ Donald McClane to L. Brent Bozell, April 28, 1970, box 101, folder 353, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹¹⁸ Michael Lawrence, interview by author, Warrington, VA, January 23, 2009.

¹¹⁹ Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America*, 158.

¹²⁰ William A. Rusher to William F. Buckley, Jr., March 13, 1974, box 167, folder 1099, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

intellectual community was much more significant.¹²¹ *Triumph* was in danger of being ignored, even by those intellectuals, such as Buckley, who had at one time regarded Bozell as “the expositor of our generation.”¹²²

Triumph's loss of influence was a consequence of two main factors: the unwillingness of the editors to ignore what they regarded as crucial failings within the American system as well as the Catholic Church, and Brent Bozell's own manic depression. Leading conservative intellectuals continued to reach out to Bozell in the hope of convincing him to tone down what they regarded as his defeatist and anti-conservative tone. For example, in 1968, Neil McCaffrey wrote to Brent Bozell to express his concern. “The apocalyptic tone bothers me, the hand-rubbing glee over our troubles. The way to save society is not to dismantle it, then hope to reconstruct it by saying the rosary. This is utopian, and irresponsible. I might add that it is also a cheap way out.”¹²³ In a similar letter written two years later he added, “The American system as we have known it may be nearing bankruptcy, and certainly the old politics is dead. But I don't think this means we give it one last kick before consigning it to the scrap heap. Much can still be saved.”¹²⁴ McCaffrey expanded on this point in reaction to the isolation advocated in “The Confessional Tribe,” stating that “I take it as a given that most Americans are redeemable, and that they want to save as much as they can of a decent way of life. They are not going to follow you into the wilderness, and I don't think

¹²¹ John Wisner to L. Brent Bozell, March 26, 1966, box 41, John Wisner, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹²² Neil McCaffrey to William F. Buckley, Jr., August 31, 1967, box 44, Neil McCaffrey - July-Dec., William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹²³ Neil McCaffrey to L. Brent Bozell, June 6, 1968, box 48, Buckley Family – Bozell, L. Brent and Patricia, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹²⁴ Neil McCaffrey to L. Brent Bozell, July 21, 1970, box 198, folder 1493, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

they should.”¹²⁵ The conservative intellectuals like William Buckley and Neil McCaffrey, who wrote repeatedly to Bozell to try to keep him in the conservative camp failed to recognize that Bozell and *Triumph* were more interested in what they considered their higher calling.

While *Triumph* was losing readership and Brent Bozell was becoming less and less of a player in the conservative intellectual debate, his wife, Patricia Bozell, described to her brother, why this was not important to her husband. “He found, at long last, what was meant to be his life’s work – a developer of the faith – others opinions no longer mattered in terms of personal self respect.”¹²⁶ This spiritual journey was more important to Bozell than anything else, and he would follow this path even if it demanded that he rail against the movement that he helped create and even if it contributed to the collapse of *Triumph*.

For Bozell this spiritual calling was so paramount that he was willing to openly break ties with his former best friend and brother-in-law. The Bozell-Buckley relationship had been under strain ever since “Letter to Yourselves” initiated a constant flow of anti-conservative *Triumph* articles. Both men worked hard for years attempting to get back to the former camaraderie that they had shared, but it seemed with each scathing back and forth between the magazines it became increasingly difficult to separate the intellectual disagreements from their personal relationship. Brent Bozell III described the painful circumstances that arose out of his father’s and uncle’s unwillingness to compromise on their intellectual positions. “It was sad, because at the

¹²⁵ Neil McCaffrey to L. Brent Bozell, July 21, 1970, box 198, folder 1493, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹²⁶ Patricia Bozell to William F. Buckley, Jr., July 1968, box 48, Buckley Family – Bozell, L. Brent and Patricia, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

center of it was my mother. She wanted to be loyal to my father and yet everyone loved my uncle. It was hurtful all the way around, however, it was understood to be an intellectual difference between the two of them and that it ought never to affect our family relationships.”¹²⁷

This ability to distinguish between their personal and intellectual relationship was impressive but not always easy given the harsh criticisms each held for the other’s editorial arguments. For instance, in 1971 Buckley was asked on his television show *Firing Line* if he felt that *Triumph* posed a dangerous threat to the conservative movement. He answered that “I don’t think it’s a threat to the conservative movement. It doesn’t have a large following and, in any case, it disdains the use of the word, conservative. It is, in my opinion, directed very idealistically toward a form of evangelism which, in fact, doesn’t work.”¹²⁸ Buckley, in a single sentence, left no doubt that he had no respect for Bozell’s ‘Christian society’ and, unlike in years past, he did not preface the statement with a disclaimer regarding his great respect for Bozell as an intellectual and a friend. At the same time and in a similar fashion Bozell was publicly disavowing his intellectual ties to his brother-in-law. In an interview Bozell stated that “It is a hindrance to be William Buckley’s brother-in-law, because people are under the assumption that I share his views. I do not. He is the right wing of the establishment. I consider myself outside the establishment.”¹²⁹ These public statements, besides signaling an irreconcilable break between former friends, also touched on the crux of the

¹²⁷ Brent Bozell III, interview by author, Alexandria, VA, December 22, 2008.

¹²⁸ “Because Buckley Didn’t Convince Bozells,” *Homefront* magazine article, April 1971, box 103, folder 373, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹²⁹ “‘Outside Establishment’ Bozell Disavows Ties to Buckley,” *Pittsburgh, PA Post-Gazette*, April 24, 1971, box 103, folder 373, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

disagreement. Buckley wanted Conservatism to be ‘a tent big enough for all,’ while Bozell believed that a conservative movement that was only concerned with electoral support would bend its’ solutions and in the process lose its Christian soul. Thus, ultimately undermining the Christian virtue that Bozell had originally hoped the conservative movement would promote. Bozell’s wife, Patricia, hinted at this separation when she was quoted in the *New York Post* as saying, “‘it’s more of an intellectual coolness than a personal one. *Triumph* believes in some things that *National Review* does not. It’s that kind of dispute.’ As for Bozell’s occasional criticism of Buckley as too liberal, she said carefully, ‘*Triumph* is narrowed to one religion – I’d say we have broader interests at *National Review*.’”¹³⁰

Buckley described this broader interest in his book *The Jeweler’s Eye: A Book of Irresistible Political Reflections*. He describes how a secularist conservative will be incomplete in his or her conservatism, but a “pro-religious conservative can therefore welcome the atheist as a full-fledged member of the conservative community even while feeling that at the very bottom the roots do not interlace.”¹³¹ Bozell saw this indiscriminating acceptance as not only hypocritical but detrimental to the movement. He was growing more convinced that American society was sick and the secularist approach championed by Buckley’s conservative view would ultimately led to the national collapse. In Bozell’s view it was dangerous to allow the libertarian principle of freedom to direct the course of conservatism when the secularism of America would only accelerate the speed at which this ‘freedom’ would eclipse the remaining virtue in

¹³⁰ “Incident at Catholic U.: The Bozell’s militant Catholicism makes even the ardently Catholic Buckleys a trifle uneasy,” *New York Post*, March 20, 1971, box 103, folder 373, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹³¹ William F. Buckley, Jr., “What is Conservatism?” in Buckley, *The Jeweler’s Eye: A Book of Irresistible Political Reflections* (New York, Putnam, 1968) 28.

society. As Bozell's son recalled, "my father had no love for the libertarian thought, he believed in personal responsibility and he also believed in social justice and social responsibility. To him it was not just a prescription for anarchy, but it was a prescription for spiritual deviance."¹³² The solution for this spiritual deviant society was clear to Bozell. A Christian conservative party must destroy the existing American structure and remake the nation with a Christian outlook.

The frustration of *National Review* conservatives about the direction of *Triumph* was substantial. Most of Bozell's former conservative colleagues did not understand how he could dismiss the electoral realities of his Christian approach. In addition, many of them were appalled by his clear anti-American tone. This concern was best captured in a letter to Michael Lawrence from Neil McCaffrey, written in 1971.

On secular matters, Triumph is against America (which I notice it is beginning to spell Amerika) and against capitalism. It is against our whole system, and rejoices with every revolutionary blow against it. ... Triumph has left the conservative movement. If it had only left to do the Lord's work, only the earthbound could complain. When Triumph announced its departure, most of us assumed that it would be a fellow traveler occupied on a more important assignment, our Father's business. Not many would have guessed that Triumph would wind up anti-conservative, losing no opportunity to beat conservatives over the head. If it had merely contented itself with criticizing conservatives were we need it, it could provide a priceless service that nobody else is offering right now. But Triumph is bitter and unbalanced about conservatives, and refuses to acknowledge anything good there because it refuses to see anything good in 'Amerika' ...Lord knows we need surgery on the system; but to cure, not kill.¹³³

McCaffrey, as well as most mainstream conservatives, were sorely disappointed with *Triumph's* direction, especially its anti-conservative approach. Many years later, however, they became more sympathetic to the radical magazine. This transition did not

¹³² Brent Bozell III, interview by author, Alexandria, VA, December 22, 2008.

¹³³ Neil McCaffrey to Michael Lawrence, February 23, 1971, box 198, folder 1495, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

evolve out of an adoption of *Triumph's* arguments but instead was driven by the recognition that some of the more extreme stances could have been influenced by Bozell's serious manic depression.

In the later years of *Triumph*, Brent Bozell's manic depression was becoming impossible to hide. In an interview, Michael Lawrence provided insight into how the illness affected the magazine as well as Bozell's life. He pointed out that the drastic mood swings began to have a debilitating effect on everything he did. To make matters worse this was not all that was wrong with Bozell. He had both physical and mental ailments. "He didn't talk about it, he offered it up, and I think he even asked for it. But it was hard for those of us that were his acolytes to admit that he was insane sometimes. He started doing some things and after awhile it became undeniable. And gradually people began peeling away." As editor in the later years of *Triumph*, Lawrence's chief concern was mostly to prevent the crazy things from happening.¹³⁴ Bozell in his literary autobiography *Mustard Seeds: A Conservative becomes a Catholic* stated that there was likely a connection between "*Triumph's* fall and my manic depression. I had some short spells of the illness, undiagnosed at the time, in the last years of *Triumph*; and they probably contributed to the lack of peace at the magazine."¹³⁵

Brent Bozell's manic depression combined with the radicalization of *Triumph* caused the magazine through the 1970's to constantly be on the brink of financial collapse. Fundraising drives became a necessity, sometimes multiple times a year, just to keep publishing. However, *Triumph* was not completely without notice. For instance, in 1971 the leaders from Young Americans for Freedom on Buckley's television show

¹³⁴ Michael Lawrence, interview by author, Warrington, VA., January 23, 2009.

¹³⁵ L. Brent Bozell, *Mustard Seeds*, 4.

Firing Line, referred to *Triumph* as “one of the greater concerns of the conservative movement today.”¹³⁶ Additionally, in an article about the Buckley-Bozell feud, *Homefront* magazine noted the competing paths of conservatism questioning that “in trying to determine who points the way the rightwing is heading, does one watch the Buckleys or the Bozells?”¹³⁷ However, for the most part, by the mid-1970’s most of *Triumph*’s media attention focused on the magazine’s radical Catholic approach or on the political background of Bozell. By the time of the magazine’s collapse in 1977, as Joe Sobran pointed out in a letter to Buckley, “Triumph [was] the least influential publication anywhere.”¹³⁸

The failure of Bozell to sustain *Triumph*, or to create a ‘Christian civilization,’ allows historians and conservative intellectuals to dismiss both the man and his magazine as nothing more than a fringe rebellion. Bozell’s attempt to inspire a Christian conservative party never materialized. Most of his readers were shocked at the radical solutions proposed by *Triumph* even while most of them shared the magazine’s disgust at the moral decay in American society. Bozell’s own former friends simply regarded *Triumph* as a missed opportunity for the conservative movement to sweep through Catholic America. Buckley stated in a letter to a fellow conservative in reference to *Triumph* that “there is no denying the dreadful mess they made of a great opportunity.”¹³⁹ Similarly, Neil McCaffrey wrote in a letter to Buckley that “Brent blew it. He certainly

¹³⁶ “Because Buckley Didn’t Convince Bozells,” *Homefront* magazine article, April 1971, box 103, folder 373, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹³⁷ “Because Buckley Didn’t Convince Bozells,” *Homefront* magazine article, April 1971, box 103, folder 373, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹³⁸ Joe Sobran to William F. Buckley, Jr., April 10, 1974, box 167, folder 1099, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹³⁹ William F. Buckley, Jr. to Neil McCaffrey, September 4, 1975, box 198, folder 1500, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

had the brains, but not the temperament or the background.”¹⁴⁰

If one considers the entire picture of Brent Bozell’s life and looks beneath the radical underbrush to the basic conservative contradictions that he exposed throughout his life, it is possible to regard Bozell, less of a failure at creating a Christian nation and more as a central figure in the conservative journey.

When Brent Bozell died in 1997 he most likely would have cringed at the idea of being referred to as a conservative. Indeed, by the later *Triumph* years, Bozell had refuted in his mind the ‘fusionist conservatism’ that Buckley and the other *National Review* editors had championed. But his story is instructive, as it exposes the great intellectual divides inherent in conservative ‘fusionism.’ “From its inception the American conservative movement has been a hybrid, born of contradictory ideological components and deeply divided on such issues as laissez-faire capitalism, individualism and the family, and the role of religion in society.”¹⁴¹ The intellectual and personal dispute between Brent Bozell and William Buckley during the 1960s and 70s exposed many of these tensions.

Brent Bozell initially rationalized his conservative membership with the belief that the achievement of libertarian freedom would lead to an expansion of Christian virtue. In fact, his intelligence, his political appeal, and his unmatched oratory skills, made Brent Bozell an early star of the movement. The intellectual debates within the halls of the *National Review*, his experiences in Spain, and his increasing belief that only a Christian (Catholic) approach could solve the failures of American society, all

¹⁴⁰ Neil McCaffrey to William F. Buckley, Jr., September 11, 1975, box 198, folder 1500, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹⁴¹ Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America*, preface.

combined to inspire Bozell's departure from the mainstream conservative movement in favor of a more spiritual, more radical and isolated path.

Throughout his years at *National Review* and even while writing libertarian-focused books, such as *The Conscious of a Conservative*, it became increasingly clear to Bozell that this relationship between freedom and virtue was not complementary but detrimental. He had reached this conclusion while witnessing what he regarded as the break down of society: most notably the liberalization of the Catholic Church, the Nixon administration, and most importantly abortion laws. Together these break downs convinced Bozell that the time for intellectual debates within conservatism was over. Direct action had become necessary to establish a Christian civilization which could reestablish virtue in America. In Bozell's view neither America nor the conservative movement had any direct connection with the Christian tradition. As *Triumph* became increasingly extreme, it was harder to discern the relevant criticisms from the more radical ones. However, even in the later years the three central criticisms Bozell leveled at conservatism remained: a deep distrust of fusionism, an overly compromising position on the protection of life, and the belief that America was not descended from the Christian tradition.

Brent Bozell's life represented the fracture and failures of conservatism which are too often overlooked by historians. There are clear parallels between the radicalization of the right, epitomized in the extreme Catholicism of Brent Bozell, and the fracture within liberalism caused by the radicalization of the New Left. However, while the social protests and writings of the New Left are a central focus of the history of liberalism in the 1960s and 70s, the equally compelling narrative on the right is often neglected. The

conservative movement was as much about division as “fusion.” By not considering the criticisms leveled by Brent Bozell on his former ideology one does not do justice to the complicated nature of the movement. Perhaps if more attention had been given to the schismatic reality exposed by this radical intellectual, conservatism could have avoided, or at least foreseen, its present identity crisis.

Kevin Michel
The Bibliographical Essay
Advisor: Professor Beverly Gage

I was first inspired to look into the life of L. Brent Bozell during my junior year while taking Professor Geoffrey Kabaservice's class, "Liberal and Conservative Intellectual Thought in the 20th Century," number 178b. The brilliance and radicalism of Bozell intrigued me. With the encouragement of Professor Kabaservice, I decided to look deeper into the intellectual feud between Brent Bozell and William F. Buckley. I began this journey by writing an analytical comparison of a couple of articles that had been written back and forth between the two within the *National Review*. It became clear to me during that assignment that the life of Brent Bozell was not only an interesting and engaging story, but also provided insight into the inherent contradictions within conservative movement.

Once I decided that I wanted to examine the significance of Bozell life I set out to identify appropriate source material. The summer before my senior year I was disappointed to find out during an interview with Bozell's son, Brent Bozell III, that there were no 'Bozell Papers.' The few papers that had been kept had been given to a biographer, Daniel Kelley, who both Brent Bozell III and I tried unsuccessfully to contact multiple times. Despite this set back, I concluded that I could still proceed by using the William F. Buckley Papers, which were conveniently located at Yale. In order to capture Bozell's perspective I decided to closely analysis his *Triumph* articles, his literary autobiography *Mustard Seeds*, and to conduct interviews with individuals who were still alive and had been close to him.

I found ‘The William F. Buckley Papers’ to be extremely extensive and informative. The well organized boxes for each year since the early 1950s have folders with a wide-range of correspondence between Buckley and Bozell, and between Buckley and his sister, Patricia, who was also Bozell’s wife. The collection also contains whole folders of correspondence and writings having to do with *National Review* and *Triumph* magazines. These papers formed the backbone of my research and provided me with an inside look into the personal relationship between Buckley and Bozell, as well as the build up and reaction within the conservative intellectual community to Brent Bozell’s historic departure from the mainstream movement.

Although the ‘William F. Buckley Papers’ did contain most of Bozell’s more famous *Triumph* articles, I also wanted to get a feel for the magazine in its entirety. For this reason I spent many days in the fall traveling back and forth between Yale and the New York Public Library because it was one of the few places that had the whole *Triumph* collection. This collection allowed me to more closely examine the evolution of Bozell’s intellectual shift from being a Catholic *National Review* conservative, through the break with mainstream conservatism, to ultimately advocating the destruction of the American system to be replaced with a ‘Christian civilization.’ By reading through the entire magazine over its ten year existence I was able to get a feel for what impact *Triumph* was looking to have.

In addition to the articles on microfilm at the New York Public Library, I also found *The Best of Triumph* as collected by Michael Lawrence. This was a collection of the magazine’s articles which Michael Lawrence judged to be the most significant. This collection proved to be extremely helpful in shifting through which articles deserved

especially close attention. Unfortunately, given the extent of this collection there were certain aspects of the magazine that I found interesting and important but I was not able to adequately expand upon given the relatively small size of my essay.

In a longer paper I would have liked to divulge further into the uncompromising pro-life platform of the magazine. This issue captivated the *Triumph* editors and was often the cover story. It was also the issue that served as the final straw in severing the personal relationship between Buckley and Bozell. In a longer paper I would have liked to incorporate more of the debate surrounding this issue. Similar to other issues that Bozell focused on, abortion has proved to be a dividing issue amongst different fractions of the conservative movement even up to the present time. Additionally, I would have liked to place *Triumph's* abortion views into the larger debate of the time using more comprehensive secondary sources such as Michael Cuneo's *Smoke of Satan* and Carol Mason's *Killing for Life*. Ultimately, I choose not to spend a lot of the essay on this issue because abortion became more of a focus after Bozell's official break from conservatism and while the issue did play a role in radicalizing him it was not as useful as some other examples in supporting my thesis.

Brent Bozell's literary autobiography, *Mustard Seeds*, provided me with personal context regarding his experiences surrounding his break with conservatism and his embracing of a 'Christian civilization.' In this book, especially its introduction and conclusion, Bozell writes extensively about his thoughts on the successes and failures of *Triumph*, his thoughts on Catholicism, and the role his own manic depression played in his life. Brent Bozell was surprisingly open in the book. Consequently, despite the fact

that he passed away in 1997, I did not feel the paper was lacking because I was not able to interview him.

I attempted to balance Buckley's perspective, captured in his papers at Yale, by conducting interviews with those individuals who were especially close to Bozell: most notably his son, Brent Bozell III, and Michael Lawrence, who was a fellow editor at *Triumph* and something of a life long disciple of Bozell. These interviews provided stories and context surrounding the life and controversy of Brent Bozell. They also gave me insight into how his radicalism and manic depression affected his family and the magazine.

At the interview that I conducted with Michael Lawrence he provided me with a book containing a collection of obituaries, letters, and memories, which was privately published and given out to friends of the Bozell family after Bozell passed away. This *L. B. B. Memories* collection was useful in providing me a long term view of Bozell's life and intellectual transition. I found throughout the process that it was easy to get caught up analyzing the intrigue and philosophical arguments presented by Bozell's life and writings. I continually had to step back so that I did not lose sight of his larger significance within the context of the conservative movement.

Similarly, it was tempting to analyze the life of Bozell as something of a separate entity without addressing the political context of the time. Given the length of the paper it was impossible to provide a synopsis of the conservative movement or to adequately address the other social movements, such as feminism, civil rights, and the anti-War movement, which were going on at the same time. However, I did attempt to hint at these other issues throughout the paper because Bozell's actions do not make sense

without at least some understanding that he was responding to the social changes of the time. Although William Buckley was not drastically changed by the events of the 60s and 70s, Brent Bozell was completely transformed. It is this transformation that explains his break from both his friend, William Buckley, and the mainstream conservative movement.

To understand the conservative movement which Brent Bozell initially helped to build I depended on numerous books. The most noteworthy of these were Rick Perlstein's *Before the Storm* and George Nash's *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*. Although both of these narratives have a somewhat triumphant perspective of the history of conservatism, they were both extremely helpful in revealing the intricacies of the movement. I depended on their description of the major players of the movement as well as their explanations regarding ideas such as fusionism and objectivism. Often this broader conservative context had to be relegated in the paper to footnotes or passing context, but understanding the larger history of conservatism was instrumental in my understanding of the significance of Brent Bozell.

As important as it was to understand the history of the conservative movement to understand what Bozell was breaking from, it was equally important to understand the changes taking place within the Catholic community at the time to understand what Bozell was reacting to. For the Catholic context I relied most heavily on Patrick Allitt's *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985* and to a lesser extent James Fisher's *The Catholic Counterculture in America*. These comprehensive perspectives on the changes within and around the Catholic Church in the 1960s and 1970s provided me with an understanding of the controversies and tensions between

various groups of Catholics at the time. Bozell was concerned with both the direction of the conservatism and the direction of the Catholic Church. It was the combination of these two issues that led Bozell to become a proponent of radical change.

To understand Bozell's call for radical action I looked for similarities between the New Left and New Right of the time. For this understanding I turned to Rebecca Klatch's *A Generation Divided*, Dan Carter's *The Politics of Rage*, Bruce Schulman's *The Seventies*, and to a lesser degree Tom Hayden's *Port Huron Statement*. It was interesting to see how many of these movements had a similar trajectory to Bozell. Many of the movements started as intellectual exercises, grew into peaceful protests, and then they often became fed up with the do-nothing establishment that they broke with the mainstream movement to take part in more radical direct action. *Triumph's* call for direct action on the part of conservative Catholics instead of just the political debate advocated by *National Review* conservatives is extremely interesting and stuck me as similar to the conclusions being reached by the New Left at the same time. I found it remarkable that in studying liberalism in the 1960s and 70s there is a major focus on the radicalism and fracture of the new left; however, in studying conservatism during the same period, comparable fracture and radicalism, epitomized in the life of Brent Bozell, is largely ignored. I would have liked to look deeper into the similarities between Brent Bozell's extreme Catholicism and the radical actions of the New Left but there was simply not enough room in the paper to effectively flush out this interesting comparison.

For the personal relationship between William F. Buckley and Brent Bozell I depended most heavily on the 'Buckley Papers' as well as interviews. I also used secondary sources to supplement and provide a broader context to this information. The

two most noteworthy of these sources were John Judis' *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, and Charles Markmann's *The Buckley's*. These two books were most useful in shedding light on the relationship the two friends had in their early and college years. They were also helpful in exposing information that was often less than flattering toward either Buckley or Bozell and that was often not presented by their admirers in an interview.

Over the year and a half that I have been studying the life and significance of Brent Bozell I consulted many more sources than these specified. The sources mentioned, however, were the most influential in shaping my understanding of Brent Bozell and his significance. This senior essay has allowed me to explore many areas of interest to me while hopefully allowing me to provide the history community with an interesting perspective on the life of L. Brent Bozell and his significance to the Conservative Movement.

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