

## „The duties we owe to life”: dispute over the foundational values of Father Richard J. Neuhaus with George W. Bush<sup>1</sup>

„Obowiązki wobec życia”: spór o wartości podstawowe  
ojca Richarda J. Neuhaus’a z Georgem W. Bush’em

ALEKSANDRA KŁOS-SKRZYPCZAK

Uniwersytet Śląski in Katowice, Wydział Teologiczny, Poland  
aleksandra.klos-skrzypczak@us.edu.pl  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0512-7938>

**Abstract:** The article draws attention to the socio-political context of the struggle for the right to life of unborn children from an American perspective. The aim of the article is to present the socio-pastoral activities of Father Richard J. Neuhaus, a neoconservative, long-time editor-in-chief of the “First Things” magazine, who was a close unofficial advisor to President George W. Bush on activities to promote the Culture of Life. Using the document research method, the materials compiled in the New York archive of the journal “First Things” were analyzed, while the analytical-synthetic method was used to present articles and commentaries published on this subject in the mentioned periodical.

**Keywords:** Richard J. Neuhaus; George W. Bush; “First Things”; pro-life attitude

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł zwraca uwagę na kontekst społeczno-polityczny walki o prawo do życia nienarodzonych dzieci w perspektywie amerykańskiej. Celem artykułu jest prezentacja działalności społeczno-duszpasterskiej ojca Richarda J. Neuhaus’a, neokonserwatysty, redaktora czasopisma *First Things*, który nieoficjalnie doradzał prezydentowi George’owi W. Bush’owi w działaniach na rzecz promocji „Culture of Life” („Kultury życia”). Przy wykorzystaniu metody badania dokumentów poddano analizie materiały opracowane w nowojorskim archiwum czasopisma *First Things*, zaś korzystając z metody analityczno-

---

<sup>1</sup> The research activities co-financed by the funds granted under the Research Excellence Initiative of the University of Silesia in Katowice.

-syntetycznej zaprezentowano artykuły i komentarze publikowane w niniejszej tematyce na łamach wspomnianego periodyku.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Richard J. Neuhaus; George W. Bush; *First Things*, postawa pro-life

“Culture is the root of politics,  
And religion is the root of culture”

Richard John Neuhaus

## Introduction

Analyzing the American environment of people involved in social problems, whose attention focused mainly on the issue of fighting for the rights of the poor, the weaker and the discriminated, we can notice the extraordinary figure of Fr. Richard John Neuhaus. This outstanding American intellectual, a long-time collaborator of Martin Luther King, executive of the Institute on Religion and Public Life, founder and editor of the monthly “First Things”, was the author of over 20 books and countless publications. Over the years, Father Richard John Neuhaus not only accurately observed and commented on all the changes taking place in American society, but he actively participated in them. He was referred to as the “leading American rebel” against the prevailing socio-political system of the 1960s and 70s.

Father Neuhaus contributed to the promotion and defense of the pro-life stance. In the late 1970s, he became involved in the Pro-life Movement. This activity coincided with the period just after the Supreme Court’s ruling in the *Roe v. Wade* case, after which a significant portion of the U.S. citizens felt that the issue of defending life was exclusively a Christian matter (Neuhaus 1997a, 33). It should be mentioned that in January 22, 1973 Supreme Court recognized that the right to liberty in the Constitution, which protects personal privacy, includes the right to decide whether to continue a pregnancy. Despite the passage of time, Neuhaus still reminded that the problem of abortion existed and needed to be discussed. He emphasized that it was important to encourage people to discuss this issue and convey how they should approach the issue of abortion. Thanks to Neuhaus, a debate broke out between pro-life and pro-choice supporters. He demanded to establish the so-called “middle ground” i.e. compromises that allowed the debate to end. Father Neuhaus was often the voice of the Catholic Church speaking on many social issues. Eagerly invited to the world of media, he always commented and expressed opinions on social issues, always emphasizing the Church’s position and articulating teachings in an accessible and understandable manner.

Father Richard Neuhaus’s activities cover not only the public social and economic sphere, but also the political one. “First Things” editorial staff confirm that Neuhaus served, informally, as President George W. Bush’s spiritual advisor (Kłos-Skrzypczak 2016, 58). This fact is confirmed by materials (faxes) found and processed in the archive of the editorial office of the “First Things” magazine from the late 1990s, i.e. moments before George W. Bush received the nomination of the Republican Party and won the presidential election. After Bush became the president, Father Neuhaus consulted the content of his speeches several times with Mike Gorson and Peter H. Wehner. The content of these speeches concerned key ethical and moral issues for American society: defending the lives of unborn children, legalizing same-sex marriage, and conducting stem cell research.

The article is based on materials gathered in the New York archive of the journal “First Things”, among which there was the correspondence of Father Neuhaus with George W. Bush and his close collaborators, including Mike Gerson and Peter H. Wehner, who were speechwriters for the President G.W. Bush’s administration.

## **I. Christian political involvement**

In his book, Józef Fuchs writes, “The absoluteness of moral demands opposes any arbitrariness and all relativism, thereby positively defining their objectivity and conditioning by human reality” (Fuchs 1973, 198). For centuries, the Christian community has adhered to specific moral norms passed down from generation to generation. The moral duty to protect the lives of unborn children rests on healthcare workers, priests, as well as social workers, within the entire Church community. “In the face of pro-abortion attitudes exhibited by numerous international organizations, the governments of most countries, and non-governmental organizations, believers and all people concerned with the respect for human life bear the obligation of serving life and defending the unborn” (Kowalski 2005, 17-21).

Father Neuhaus has mentioned many times that Christian political involvement is an infinitely difficult topic. He recalls Psalm 146: “Put not your trust in princes”, even if it seems that [politicians] are our princes and placing them on small thrones seems fully justified. According to Father Neuhaus, “non politics can liberate us from the limits of a fallen creation” (Neuhaus 1996). While, we can explore and advocate for setting boundaries, politics, which is the ordering of all things, will always elude us. In American society, the liberal position is often associated with advocating for the liberalization of abortion laws. However, as Father Neuhaus states in a conversation with Father

Maciej Zięba, "In the American tradition, there are two liberalisms in constant conflict with each other. One is the liberalism of the autonomous individual, radically individualistic *how* where freedom is understood as liberation from all constraints. The other (...) is the liberalism of people living in community, where freedom is connected with responsibility, compassion, and care for the weaker. (...) one liberalism is based on compassion and community, the other is grounded in the individual and their rights. The liberalism advocating for the freedom to have an abortion is the one supported by radical individualism" (Neuhaus 2010, 19).

According to Father Richard Neuhaus, the Church's task is to emphasize that abortion is not merely a matter of private, religious beliefs but a moral issue of fundamental importance for everyone. He believes that the second task of the Church is "to call the entire society to reflection and reasoned debate on the matter" (Neuhaus 1993, 75). The tasks mentioned by Neuhaus encounter difficulties in implementation primarily due to the belief among Americans that discussions about ethics or morality must be avoided. The reasons for this vary: either there is a belief that objective moral truth does not exist, or there are no objective criteria for distinguishing between good and evil. Western liberal democratic societies are based on the principle of the naked public forum from which moral and religious argumentation has been removed. This situation is extremely dangerous for those social units who neither have any contact with the authorities, nor have any strength or wealth. These individuals, in a clash with stronger and wealthier individuals, are deprived of the right to freedom and moral reasons. "In such an intellectually and morally devastated environment, any statement referring to morality is considered intolerance or an anachronism" (Neuhaus 1993, 77). Richard Neuhaus referred to the clash of two visions in contemporary culture as "Kulturkampf". This concept relates to two types of liberalism: individualistic, where freedom is understood as the expansion of rights, permissions, and entitlements; and communitarian, where an inseparable aspect of freedom is responsibility. Individualistic liberalism and communitarian liberalism represent two radically different visions. In the first vision, society consists of autonomous individuals whose progress is determined by the fewest possible constraints. The second vision assumes a society composed of responsible individuals, focused on community activities: family, Church, local community. "Some (opponents) (...) felt that the revival of religion in the public sphere was a mortal threat to everything they hold dear in America (...). By joining forces with older advocates of strict secularism, they angrily warn against the threats from the religious right" (Neuhaus 2007, no. 4,47) said Fr. Neuhaus.

The position mentioned above, according to Father Richard, does not entail discrimination or the exclusion of non-believers from political life (Weigel

2008, 115). In a democratic state, the public forum is accessible to all citizens. Neuhaus, quoting Adam Kirsch, describes the type of religion that can safely be admitted to the public forum as follows: “a vision of faith that seems genuinely American: pragmatic, experience-based, internal, more interested in love and forgiveness than in judgment and punishment.” (...) At least it cannot harm the republic” (Neuhaus 2007, no. 4,48) . Father Richard Neuhaus explains his way of thinking as follows: “If the human heart is not rooted in any community beyond the political one, and the human mind does not have a more than political perspective, there is a huge chance that it will be able to satisfy its deepest longings and desires, its pursuit of truth and the sense of unity with other people, humanity will turn to politics. This is the demonic dimension of politics as false religion” (Neuhaus 1993, 66).

Richard Neuhaus stated that he was well aware that there would never be a society, in any country, that would be entirely pro-life, welcoming every newborn child with open arms (Neuhaus 2010, 53). It’s a maximalist goal. “(...) In politics, you have to accept compromises. Legal solutions are formed by trial and error – two steps forward, one step back” (Neuhaus, 2010, 58). Father Neuhaus also states that even though in democratic America over 90% of the population identifies as believers (Christians and Jews), it is precisely in this society that legal and moral claims for unborn children must be demanded. In an interview with Bartłomiej Kuchniarz, Father Neuhaus asks the question: “Would it be good to claim that we are a Christian nation, subservient to God?” (Neuhaus 2010, 63) In response to this question, Father Neuhaus gives a negative answer, stating that any other answer could trivialize religious minorities and would also be a contentious issue for those Christians who fear government interference in doctrinal matters. This position is rooted in morality, asserting that an attempt by the government to define what constitutes true religion is equivalent to exceeding its competence. In the article “De-Christianization of America” Richard J. Neuhaus vividly outlines the profile of the American Christian society, quoting Adam Wolfe, a sociologist from Boston College: “(...) with the exception of views on homosexuality, Americans, despite identifying themselves as Christians, are more or less as good liberals as everyone else”. Regarding conservative Christians and people baptized with the true religion, he barely sees them on his radar. “Just like other extremists, they are marginal and should remain on the margins” (Neuhaus 2007, no. 4,48) he states. Richard J. Neuhaus, in one of his books, asserts that the law is not like life – that’s where its usefulness lies, and even its majesty. The law is not like life – that is its weakness, and even its danger. However, according to Father Richard, it can be said that the law is a part of life. Moreover, it is a part of the shared experience we call history, which also includes the present. The law itself, as emphasized by Neuhaus, has its history. In book

“The Naked Public Square” Neuhaus wrote: “The law is not like life. Therein lies its utility and even its majesty. The law is not like life. Therein lies its weakness and even its danger. To be sure, the law is part of life; it is part of that communal experience we call history, including this present moment. Law itself, as we shall emphasize, has a history” (Neuhaus 1997a, 147). Neuhaus’ opinion, the crisis in the United States lies in the fact that society has too little democracy. A democratic society that gradually strives to respect the lives of unborn children is the ideal state to which Americans should aspire.

In “The Naked Public Square” in the chapter dedicated to individual morality and public virtue, Richard Neuhaus presents the necessity of the Church’s involvement in the crisis of the legitimation of public life. The Catholic Church is largely responsible for shaping public life. In his book, he writes that, in addition to responsibility – in terms of both guilt and contributions – the Church has a strong interest in protecting itself. Father Neuhaus is referring to the protection of religious freedom, which depends on how the carrier of transcendental truth is understood and who interprets it, and where. Otherwise, according to Neuhaus, we could speak of the Church as one among many similar institutions (Neuhaus 1997a, 33). “Naked public forum is a metaphor for life (...) public, which is completely detached from religion and morality rooted in religion. (...) The liberal-democratic tradition cannot accommodate differences in the definition of the good, including the common good. (...) The naked public forum excludes all the institutions and individuals who want to raise questions about purposes, not just the means of politics. This particularly results in the exclusion of any references to religion” (Neuhaus 2010, 155). Arguing that it is impossible to separate politics from moral issues, Father Neuhaus, during the interview, invokes Aristotle’s definition of politics: “Politics is free people deliberating how they should order their common life”. Referring to the word “should” Neuhaus suggests that by its very nature, politics must be a moral endeavor. Father Neuhaus, in the book “American Babylon” in a chapter dedicated to the development of moral ideas, writes that in the sphere of what we might call “political morality” we have drawn lessons from a notorious past. However, as Father Neuhaus points out, moral progress is difficult to discern. It can be seen that the events of the past century have destroyed the ideas of moral progress. That is why we should keep in mind the dramatic moral regression that is taking place (Neuhaus 2007, 95).

## **2. Promotion of the culture of life**

“Politics is chiefly a function of culture, at the heart of culture is morality, and at the heart of morality is religion” Father Richard used to say. When assessing



Father Neuhaus’s involvement in social issues, especially during moments of change in American culture, it is important to emphasize “(...) his willingness to forsake friendships and old alliances to pursue the truth – it is ever more clear that he was willing to obey the promptings of his faith, no matter where they took him” (Arroyo 2009).

The majority of American Catholics have been voting for the Democratic Party for years. “It is said that when a child is baptized in Boston, the priest issues a baptismal certificate, the union activist issues a membership card, and the head of the Democratic Party branch puts them on the voter list” (Neuhaus, 2010, 150) – Father Neuhaus stated in one of his interviews. It is worth mentioning that at the end of the 19th century, Boston was settled by Irish Catholic immigrants. The Republican Party at that time exhibited nativist, anti-Catholic, and hostile attitudes towards the Irish, unlike members of the Democratic Party. As a result, over the years, a loyalty among Catholics towards the Democratic Party developed, along with hostility towards the Republican Party.

During Franklin D. Roosevelt’s presidency, the percentage of Catholics supporting the Democratic Party was nearly 90%. The definitive moment for Catholics in American politics came in 1961 after John F. Kennedy, also a Catholic, won the presidential election. Loyalty and unity among Catholics in politics came to an end during Ronald Reagan’s presidency due to the abortion issue. Pro-life advocates, forming coalitions with Republicans, had high hopes for President Reagan to take actions to protect the lives of unborn children. Unfortunately, he did not meet the expectations of pro-life advocates.

In the American society, abortion focuses on social problems and causes considerable tension. It shows social polarization, both moral and political, so it is easy to use it to achieve certain political victories. Some Catholics, the so-called “progressive Catholics”, as mentioned by Fr. Neuhaus call themselves liberal democrats, which translates into their position on the topic of abortion. The issue of advocating for the lives of unborn children lies at the very heart of the American public debate and serves as a reference point in every presidential campaign: “Taking power in the White House (...) begins with three things: staff changes, redecorating the Oval Office, and... the new president signing a decree – either funding or banning federal budget support for organizations promoting abortion worldwide” (Dziedzina 2017).

It seems that the political activity of George W. Bush, culminating in his assumption of power in the Oval Office, largely revolves around the issue of the pro-life stance. However, it is worth emphasizing that George W. Bush, like many other Republicans of his generation, began his political career with a reputation as a moderate conservative, especially on social issues. It seems that he shaped his views on the issue of the fight for the lives of unborn children under the influence of religious conservatives, to whom Father Richard

J. Neuhaus probably belonged. When asked during the presidential debate between George W. Bush and Al Gore on October 3, 2000, he unequivocally stated: "I think a noble goal for this country is that every child, born or unborn, need to be protected by law and welcomed to life. I know we need to change a lot of minds before we get there in America. What I do believe is that we can find good, common ground on issues of parental consent or parental notification. I know we need to ban partial birth abortions. This is a place where my opponent and I have strong disagreement. I believe banning partial birth abortions would be a positive step to reducing the number of abortions in America. This is an issue that will require a new attitude. We've been battling over abortion for a long period of time. Surely this nation can come together to promote the value of life (...) Surely we can find common ground to reduce the number of abortions in America" (The Commission 2000).

During his presidency, he referred to himself as a promoter of a culture of life: "In the debate about the rights of the unborn, we are asked to broaden the circle of our moral concern. We're asked to live out our calling as Americans. We're asked to honor our own standards, announced on the day of our founding in the Declaration of Independence. We're asked by our convictions and tradition and compassion to build a culture of life, and make this a more just and welcoming society" (The White House 2003). On the eve of moving to the White House, George W. Bush, when asked about abortion issues, stated that he did not believe the nation was ready to overturn the *Roe v. Wade* decision. However, as he emphasized, he campaigned as a pro-life candidate because he believed it was crucial to raise awareness of the value of human life (Laura Bush 2001).

While building a Culture of Life, President Bush took several measures. In 2003, he signed The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act (Partial-Birth 2003), about which he spoke at The Ronald Reagan Building. He stated that "The facts about partial birth abortion are troubling and tragic, and no lawyer's brief can make them seem otherwise. By acting to prevent this practice, the elected branches of our government have affirmed a basic standard of humanity, the duty of the strong to protect the weak. The wide agreement amongst men and women on this issue, regardless of political party, shows that bitterness in political debate can be overcome by compassion and the power of conscience. And the executive branch will vigorously defend this law against any who would try to overturn it in the courts" (The White House 2003). In 2002, a year earlier, George W. Bush signed the Born-Alive Infants Protection Act (Born-Alive 2002), under which any infant born alive, including an infant surviving an abortion procedure, would be recognized as a person under federal law. In 2004, President Bush, through the Unborn Victims of Violence Act (Unborn Victims 2004), ensured that a person who causes the death or injury of an



unborn child would be charged with a separate offense, in addition to charges related to the mother, according to federal law.

Among President George W. Bush's actions towards the Culture of Life, it is worth mentioning the establishment of the President's Council on Bioethics (President's Council 2001-2009), which was tasked with advising on bioethical issues arising from advances in biomedical science and technology. In 2001, the Bush administration allocated over \$170 million for research on stem cell lines derived from human embryos that had already been destroyed. Bush's Council on Bioethics was predominantly Catholic, and his stem-cell line decision attempted to respect Catholic moral principles.

Considering the political activity of George W. Bush, based on the conviction that every human life, from the moment of conception, is valuable, it is worth noting one fact. Specifically, in the autobiography published shortly after the end of his presidency, W. Bush recalls a tragedy that befell his family in the mid-1960s. Teenage George, the eldest child in the family, transported his miscarrying mother to the hospital ward (Bush 2010). As he writes in the book “Decision Points” (Bush 2010) “he did not expect that he would have to rescue human remains in order to place them in a jar. As W. Bush writes “I remember thinking: There was a human life, a little brother or sister” (Kengor 2010). A few years earlier, George W. Bush had lost his sister Robin, who passed away due to cancer. The loss of children at different stages of development left a painful mark on the entire Bush family.

What George W. Bush observed after his mother's miscarriage “was a vivid, early substitute for an ultrasound image. It portrayed the other end of life. He saw not a brother or sister sucking a thumb or grasping a toe in the womb but someone who never made it. Either way, he saw a human life. He saw a brother or sister—another potential Robin. Clearly, he or she was not a blob of tissue” (Kengor 2010).

### **3. Pro-life attitude in the socio-political dimension**

In his political activity, George W. Bush referred to himself as “I am pro-life”. However, it is worth noting that the direction of his actions, both in the social and political spheres, was often influenced by Father Richard J. Neuhaus, an informal advisor. This fact is confirmed not only by materials from the New York archive of the “First Things” journal but also by various sources. At the end of the 1990s, according to Randy Boyagoda's biography of Richard J. Neuhaus, Neuhaus was very active in Texas society. In May 1998, during a visit to Concordia University in Austin, Father Neuhaus had breakfast with George Bush, who was the governor of Texas at that time. It was a time when

Bush was considering a run for the presidency. Neuhaus, a Catholic intellectual respected among Americans and known for his ecumenical activities, according to Karl Rove, would constitute “a coalition of religious conservatives, primarily made up of Catholics and evangelicals, that could translate into a substantial electoral advantage” (Boyagoda 2015, 338). According to Rove, Neuhaus’s support would shape the political actions of George W. Bush because “Neuhaus was at once the perfect tutor and guarantor for (...) plans and needs, a position helped along by his recurring reproaches of the Clinton presidency on both personal terms and in terms of the administration’s policies” (Kengor 2010).

It is worth noting that in the “First Things” magazine, Father Neuhaus devoted a lot of attention to criticizing the actions of President Bill Clinton’s government. In March 1997, he wrote directly that President Clinton’s attitude lacked honesty and reliability, and “the prestige media, so eager for his victory, and his opponents, so eager not to seem nasty, decided that the man’s wretched character is a political non issue” (Neuhaus 1997b). In one of his columns published in the pages of “First Things”, to which Boyagoda refers, Father Neuhaus argued that “Clinton was more than a serial liar or even compartmentalizer of his personal and political activities: he was, in fact, endowed with a *species of autism* that explained his otherwise inexplicably self-involved behavior, behavior that for too long had been enabled by an increasingly crude national culture and a citizenry that was at times little more than a bunch of *slobs*” (Boyagoda 2015, 339). Perhaps we should trace Governor Bush’s efforts to secure the presidency back to Father Richard Neuhaus’s bitter statement: “For the next little while we are stuck with a president who, beyond reasonable doubt, is guilty of perjury, tampering with witnesses, and obstruction of justice, and who probably is a rapist” (Neuhaus, June 1999). Father Neuhaus expressed his opinion about President Bill Clinton in “First Things” magazine around a year before meeting George W. Bush, the future 43rd president of the United States of America.

According to Randy Boyagoda, Father Richard J. Neuhaus was convinced that George W. Bush would be an entirely different and better president than Bill Clinton, considering moral aspects and public actions. After returning from Austin in May 1998, Neuhaus sent a note to Bush with the following content: “Our wide-ranging conversation gave me abundant reason to hope that you will seek the opportunity to be of still greater service to our country” (Boyagoda 2015, 339). During a morning meeting, a coalition was formed between two personalities: one side (Bush) was willing to accept any guidance on social and political actions, while the other side (Neuhaus) was ready to share them. According to Boyagoda, in this relationship, “Neuhaus had more business here than friendly flattery: he commended Bush’s ambition to pro-

pose a politics of hope to the American people rather than any superficial optimism” (Boyagoda 2015, 339).

Among the notes of Father Richard Neuhaus in the New York archive of “First Things”, you can find the text of W. Bush’s speech at a meeting with representatives of the National Right to Life in 1999. From the correspondence, it appears that Father Neuhaus received material for analysis, with the aim of making specific comments and corrections. In the text sent on June 12, 1999, we read: “I believe that every life is valuable, even when it is unwanted, even when it is physically imperfect (...) I believe our nation should set a goal: that unborn children should be welcomed in life and protected in law” (Neuhaus 1999). Over a year before the elections, George W. Bush promises, “as a president I would appoint judges who have a judicial temperament, share my conservative philosophy and who will strictly interpret the constitution, rather than legislating from the bench, I support the goal of a constitutional amendment” (Neuhaus 1999). At the end of his speech, the future President of the United States stated: “Our nation (...) has offered shelter of our laws to African-Americans, to women, to immigrants, to people with disabilities. I do not believe that progress has ended. I do not believe the promises of the Declaration of Independence are just for the strong, that independent, the healthy” (Neuhaus 1999).

In response to the material sent on June 13, 1999, Father Neuhaus sent a fax to his “dear friend” George W. Bush (Neuhaus 1999), formulating specific issues related to the protection of the lives of the unborn. In his message, Richard Neuhaus directly refers to the *Roe vs. Wade* case and writes: “I believe you should state publicly that you think *Roe v. Wade* was wrongly decided (...) Please do not say (...) that you cannot make a judgment about *Roe v. Wade* because *I am not a lawyer*” (Neuhaus 1999). In the further part of the fax, he emphasizes that if during the campaign, George W. Bush cannot admit that the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade* was incorrect, then in public debate, he should use “some language that is, I believe, both truthful and useful in disarming the critics” (Neuhaus 1999).

Without unnecessary formalities, Father Neuhaus provides specifics that the future 43rd President of the United States should use in public discussion (the sentences are formulated in the first person singular). Namely, that Americans, in fact, do not support the *Roe v. Wade* decision, thus disagreeing with the right to legalize abortion throughout the entire duration of pregnancy. Additionally, in the case of *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (Planned Parenthood 1992), it was not as obvious as it might seem because: “(...) only a minority of Supreme Court justices were prepared to argue that *Roe v. Wade* was rightly decided. Others said it was wrongly decided, and yet others said it should be maintained in order to uphold the Court’s own precedent” (Planned Parent-

hood 1992). Furthermore, as Father Richard Neuhaus writes, 26 years after the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the issue of abortion remains unresolved, as “it is perhaps the single most unsettled and unsettling question in our public life. Therefore the question is this: What can we do now, and in what direction should we move in the years ahead?” (Planned Parenthood 1992).

Father Neuhaus states that American society has been engaged in the issue of abortion since the mid-1960s. This public discussion takes on many facets: legal, moral, and cultural. Regarding the legal aspect, the question is raised about whose life should be protected by legislative provisions. According to Father Richard, “(...) we must work toward the goal of an America in which unborn children are welcomed in life and protected by law”.

In concluding his written statement, Father Richard Neuhaus suggests that in his campaign, George W. Bush should not treat the issue of abortion as a side issue but should make it his main topic: “I will not walk away from this (abortion) debate. My position is clear. I am running for president in the confidence that most Americans share my commitment to a nation in which everybody, including the unborn child, is welcomed in life and protected in law”.

“An election year does strange things to people” (Neuhaus 1996) wrote Father Neuhaus in one of his columns in “First Things”, bitterly summarizing President W. Bush’s victory in November 2000. He wrote in the “First Things” magazine that the result of the presidential election is as disturbing as it is unprecedented, and that the head of state will be tasked not only with making political decisions, but rather with cultural decisions and “the reconstitution of a functioning moral consensus in a suddenly polarized country” (Neuhaus 2001). Saying that the result of the presidential elections was disturbing and unprecedented, Father Neuhaus explained as follows: in Los Angeles Times polls, the most important issue for the American electorate turned out to be moral and ethical values, although for only 14% of voters abortion turned out to be a priority issue (17% of Bush’s voters and 12% of Gore’s voters). Statistical data that deeply moved Father Richard was the fact that over 90% of the African American community voted for Al Gore. Moreover, as Neuhaus emphasizes in his column, more than half of Catholics across America cast their votes for Gore. According to Richard J. Neuhaus, the message, especially on the issue of abortion, reaches Catholics, but the majority ignores it.

In his text, Neuhaus cites a reflection on cultural politics by Francis Fukuyama, according to whom “[we] can undo the fact of an information society in which (...) the reality of contraception and abortion has broken the links between sex, babies, and the necessary male. This leaves conservatives moralistically complaining about moral decline in a society in which the greatest moral passion turns out to be hostility to ‘moralism’ in areas related to sex and family life”. According to Fukuyama, lamenting the decline of societal moral

values is necessary so that we do not become accustomed to the current state of affairs. Nevertheless, “the winning side will be the side that more convincingly articulates a more promising future that both accommodates legitimate interests and appeals to a sense of moral possibility.” In Neuhaus’s opinion, “that (...) is the intuition behind Bush’s compassionate conservatism, a formulation unjustly derided by many conservatives” (Neuhaus 2001). ”.

## Summary

After assuming the presidency, George W. Bush emphasized clearly and distinctly that it was Father Neuhaus who stood behind “articulating these religious things” (Boyagoda 2015, 301). Father Richard John Neuhaus not only influenced the pro-life agenda during President Bush’s term but also served as his longtime informal advisor. Despite their activities on both sides, Bush and Neuhaus remained in constant contact, as evidenced by a photograph from January 2004 taken in the Oval Office. In the picture, President W. Bush is seen with Father Neuhaus and two friends, George Weigel and Mary Ann Glendon.

“We, the People” wrote Father Neuhaus toward the end of his life, “have not ratified the killing logic of *Roe v. Wade*, and we will not do so. The infamous decision of 1973 is the event in the last half-century of the nation’s history that had the greatest moral and political consequences. It caused a radical shift in the balance of moral and political forces, led jointly by evangelicals and Catholics, joined by countless citizens who understand that how we respond to this atrocity will define us as individuals and as a nation. Our adversaries, once so confident, are now on the defensive. Having lost the debate with the American people, they cling desperately to the dictates of the judiciary. Unable to present themselves as the wave of the future, they watch in horror as they retreat through the bloodshed caused by the abortion industry, so arrogantly imposed by judges who place themselves above the rule of law” (Neuhaus 2010, 441).

## BIBLIOGRAFIA

- Arroyo, Raymond. 2009, January 9. "Father Richard John Neuhaus: A Man Animated by His Faith." *The Wall Street Journal*. Accessed: 10.05.2023. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB123146278576166541>.
- Born-Alive Infants Protection Act of 2002*. Accessed 10.01.2024. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/2175>.
- Boyagoda, Randy. 2015. *Richard John Neuhaus. A life In The Public Square*. New York.
- Bush, George W. 2010. *Decision Point*. Gardners.
- Dziedzina, Jacek. 2017, February 02. "Pro-life vs Pro-choice: Ameryka na śmierć i życie." *Plus Minus*. Accessed: 10.01.2024. <https://www.rp.pl/plus-minus/art10670091-pro-life-vs-pro-choice-ameryka-na-smierc-i-zycie>.
- From the archive of Richard John Neuhaus. Fax regarding "National Right to Life Remarks." Dated Monday, July 12, 1999, at 1:13 PM.
- From the archive of Richard John Neuhaus. A fax dated Tuesday. 1999, July 13. Addressed directly to Governor George W. Bush, Post Office Box 1902, Austin, TX 78767-1902.
- Fuchs, Józef. 1974. *Teologia moralna*. Translated by L. Bobiatyński and E. Krasnowolska. Warszawa.
- George W Bush's pro-life views shaped by mother's miscarriage*. 2010, November 9. Accessed: 25.01.2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PR2fLi2kbIE>.
- Kengor, Paul G. 2010, November 22. *Decision Point: George W. Bush's Pro-Life Path*. Accessed: 10.01.2024. <https://www.faithandfreedom.com/decision-point-george-w-bushs-pro-life-path/>.
- Kłos-Skrzypczak, Aleksandra. 2016. *Rodzina wartości? Perspektywa amerykańska*. Katowice: Emmanuel.
- Kowalski, Jan. 2005. "Aborcja." In: *Encyklopedia bioetyki*, edited by Andrzej Muszala, 17-21. Radom.
- "Laura Bush Speaks Out on Abortion." *ABC News*. 2001, January 19. Accessed: 25.01.2024. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=122008&page=1>.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. 1993. *Biznes i Ewangelia. Wyzwanie dla chrześcijanina – kapitalisty*. Translated by B. Szlachta. Poznań.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. 1996, May. "Against Christian Politics." *First Things*. Accessed: 09.05.2023. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1996/05/against-christian-politics>.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. 1997a. *The Naked Public Square. Religion and democracy in America*. Michigan.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. 1997b, March. "A Mirror of The National Soul." *First Things*. Accessed: 13.01.2024. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1997/03/a-mirror-of-the-national-soul>.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. 1999, June. "Bill Clinton and the American Character." *First Things*. Accessed: 13.01.2024. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1999/06/bill-clinton-and-the-american-character>.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. 2001, February. "The Two Politics of Election 2000." *First Things*. Accessed: 13.01.2024. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2001/02/the-two-politics-of-election>.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. 2007. "Dechrystianizacja Ameryki." *First Things Polish Edition*, 4(4): 47.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. 2009. *American Babylon*. New York.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. 2010. *Prorok z Nowego Jorku*. Warszawa: Fronda.
- Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003*. Public Law No: 108-105 (11/05/2003). Accessed: 10.01.2024. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/senate-bill/3>.
- Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey* 505 U.S. 833. 1992, April 22. Accessed: 13.01.2024. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/505/833/>.
- President's Council on Bioethics 2001-2009*. Accessed: 10.01.2024. [https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/past\\_commissions/](https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/past_commissions/).



- The Commission on Presidential Debates*. 2000, October 3. Transcript. Accessed: 25.01.2024. <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-3-2000-transcript/>.
- The White House. President George W. Bush*. 2003, November 5. Accessed: 10.01.2024. <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/achievement/chap15.html>.
- The White House. President Bush Signs Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003*. Accessed: 10.01.2024. <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031105-1.html>.
- Unborn Victims of Violence Act of 2004*. Public Law No. 108-212 (04/01/2004), Accessed: 10.01.2024. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/1997/text>.
- Weigel, George. 2008. *Against the Grain*. New York.

**ALEKSANDRA KŁOS-SKRZYPCZAK** – Doctor of Theology, Master of Sociology; Associate Professor at the Faculty of Theology, University of Silesia in Katowice, director of courses: theology; family science. Research interests: moral and social aspects of prenatal child loss, marriage and family in American society, American neoconservatism.