

## **Obama and His Withering Defense of Secularism<sup>1</sup>**

Karin Fry

Associate Professor of Philosophy

University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point

It is clear that President Barack Obama has a sophisticated understanding of the church/state debate and he has often been frustrated by the partisan and polarizing rhetoric surrounding this issue in the United States. Obama claims that Christians are far more tolerant than their portrayals and “secularists” are far more interested in morality, ethics, and spirituality than the media admits.<sup>2</sup> As a former law professor and a practicing Christian, he understands both sides of the culture war debate and has put forth a centrist approach to find common understanding between partisans of both sides. However, even though Obama has maintained a centrist view, he has increasingly dropped public discussion of the secular side of the issue. As a state senator, Obama was much more outspoken in his defense of separation of church and state, but as he has progressed in the national stage, his defense of this principle has dwindled to silence. Occasionally, Obama references concepts like “freedom of religion” in his foreign policy speeches to the Muslim world, but he avoids domestic discussion of the separation between church and the state and argues that this is a “negative” approach that should be avoided by Democrats. While I agree that is a mistake to belittle the practice of Christianity, I also fear that the widespread belief in the importance of American secularism is at risk and debate about it should not be ignored or stifled by the Left, even in the interests of political expediency. Obama believes that being publicly religious and advocating separation of church and state are not mutually exclusive, and in the past, has suggested that a more complicated conversation between opponents is possible. Yet, avoidance of one side of the discussion will not produce a nuanced conversation and risks further years of negativity associated with this debate. Finding a

centrist approach in this case is not to be rejected, but must occur actively, so that instead of ending and silencing the conversation, a new conversation can begin.

### **Religion and Party Politics Leading up to the 2008 Election<sup>3</sup>**

In some ways, Barack Obama's position on religion and politics has become the mainstream position of the Democratic Party. The 2008 presidential election was widely understood as an election in which the Democrats tried to regain evangelical Christian voters that they had lost since the 1980's. From the time of the Reagan administration, there has been a dramatic increase in the visibility of religion in the White House, as well as an increased use of religious terminology in public speeches. According to David Domke and Kevin Coe, the invocation of God in presidential addresses prior to Ronald Reagan's presidency occurred in roughly half of presidents' speeches, but after Reagan, the invocation of God increased to over 90% of the time.<sup>4</sup> The rise of God talk after 1981 also coincided with a steadily increasing discussion of morality politics, or the public debate concerning whether certain behavior is morally correct.<sup>5</sup> Republicans latched on to the language of morality politics in relation to abortion, school prayer, gay and lesbian rights, stem cell research, and the Equal Rights Amendment, and through it, gained evangelical and fundamentalist Christian support. Evangelical Protestants are the largest religious voting bloc in America, consisting of 26.3% of the population.<sup>6</sup> With the help of the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition, the Republicans achieved political dominance by using moral debates tactically. At the same time, the Democrats continued to lose "values" voters and avoided the use of moral language. The result has come to be known as the "God gap," or the statistical fact that in recent years, the more that one attends church, the more likely one will vote Republican. Many voters believe that strong public professions of faith are an indication of having strong moral values and attach importance to this characteristic when

voting.<sup>7</sup> In the 2008 election, exit polls indicated that 30% of voters thought that the values of the candidate were the most important aspect to consider when voting for him and 65% of these voters voted for John McCain.<sup>8</sup>

In *The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats are Closing the God Gap*, Amy Sullivan states that the inability of certain Democratic presidential candidates like Mike Dukakis, Walter Mondale, and John Kerry to connect with religious audiences was an important and powerful reason for their losses.<sup>9</sup> Sullivan contends that on the other hand, Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama's abilities to engage with Christian voters contributed to their victories.<sup>10</sup> Bill Clinton's presidency interrupted the Republican dominance of the White House and is a good example of a Democrat who was comfortable discussing his religiosity. Elected after 12 years of Republican rule, Clinton understood that Democrats tended to have an "intolerant" secular approach. Clinton's Southern Baptist upbringing and ability to quote scripture at will, impressed many Christian voters.<sup>11</sup> Amy Sullivan calls Clinton the "...most overtly religious president the country had ever seen," since many of his speeches included direct references to the Bible and he made a conscious effort to reach out to a variety of religious communities. He also provided important Christian leaders with access to the White House, including an inner circle of spiritual advisors with whom he prayed regularly.<sup>12</sup> Clinton's effort to engage Christian voters, however, did not always have them convinced of the authenticity of his faith. His defense of abortion, but particularly, the Monica Lewinsky scandal, left suspicion concerning the depth of his faith.<sup>13</sup>

After Clinton, the Democratic presidential candidates did not recognize the value in courting the "values" voter. For example, John Kerry had one religious outreach advisor for his entire campaign, while Republicans had outreach advisors in all the battle ground states as well as an extensive data-base of information that the Democrats lacked.<sup>14</sup> After John Kerry's failure with Christian voters in 2004, the Democratic National Committee set out to address the problem head on.

The Democrats decided to go after the Christian voter, realizing that Christians are the majority of the population and to alienate the “values” voter was a political suicide. Several democratic candidates employed religious outreach advisors in the 2008 presidential election in order to regain this voting constituency.<sup>15</sup> *Time* magazine suggested in a cover-story entitled “How the Democrats got Religion,” that you could call the Democrats “...the new Moral Majority.”<sup>16</sup> Specifically, the goal was to turn the 25-74 percent disadvantage advantage of white evangelicals, into a 50-50 split, and to regain Catholic voters who had defected over culture war issues.<sup>17</sup> Some expected a major swing of Christians toward the Democratic Party, but according to John C. Green, the 2008 election did not signal a fundamental shift in religious voting, but merely a variation within the structure, as the Republicans retained the majority of the white evangelical Christian vote.<sup>18</sup>

### **Barack Obama, Religion, and Politics**

Regardless of how voting went during the 2008 election, there is certainly evidence that Obama has long engaged with Christian voters and worked to make them feel included in his campaign. In his book, *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama discusses his personal religious commitments openly and articulates how his faith has informed his politics. Obama describes his upbringing as Christian, though his mother and grandparents attended church only on major holidays and in general, his family was not practicing. Nonetheless, he calls his mother as a “...spiritually awakened person...” who made the discussion of values fundamental in her son’s upbringing.<sup>19</sup> Due to his mother’s interest in anthropology, he was exposed to many different kinds of faith. As a child, Obama visited places like Buddhist temples and ancient Hawaiian burial sites.<sup>20</sup> Obama describes his mother as a “...lonely witness for secular humanism...” who thought that knowledge of cultural differences was very important part of becoming educated.<sup>21</sup> When he was living in Indonesia with his mother and Indonesian step-father, Obama attended a Catholic school and later, a predominantly

Muslim school, but he was not a participant in either religion.<sup>22</sup> His Kenyan biological father was an atheist, but his grandfather on that side of the family was Muslim.

As an adult, when Obama was working with the churches as a community organizer in the South Side of Chicago, he became aware that he lacked a community of shared belief. Intrigued by the African American religious tradition that promoted social change and an active interest in this world, Obama states that he finally understood that he could be a Christian even though he still had certain doubts.<sup>23</sup> He describes his decision to join Trinity United Church of Christ at the age of 26 as a conscious choice, not a moment of revelation.<sup>24</sup> Obama states that he remained skeptical in some ways, but it is clear that he has a deep respect for Christianity and actually named his 2006 book after a sermon given by his pastor, Jeremiah Wright. “The Audacity of Hope” was the title of a sermon by Wright and a phrase that Obama referenced during his famous speech to the Democratic National Convention in 2004 that thrust him on to the national stage. In that speech Obama states

The audacity of hope! In the end, that is God’s greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation.

A belief in things not seen. A belief that there are better days ahead.<sup>25</sup>

Due to his work with the faith based community in Chicago, Obama was persuaded that that many people were motivated to act politically through religion, as the vast majority of groups he worked with were people connected to different congregations. Obama witnessed that religious faith could be a deep source for political change in the world and concluded that seeking to remove religion and religious language entirely from politics could be detrimental to political action in some respects. He disagreed with the Democratic Party’s tradition to keep religion and politics separate.

In an interview given in 2004 that is widely circulated on religiously conservative sites on the web, Obama goes into much further detail about his theological beliefs and religious upbringing than he does in *The Audacity of Hope*. This interview took place when Obama was a state senator in the

Illinois legislature running for a national seat in the Senate. Discussing his moment of conversion, he says that he was moved by the church and he recognized the power of religion to console people. Obama asserts that he went up for an altar call during his moment of formal conversion, but reiterates that it was not an epiphany, but a public affirmation of faith that had been growing within him. When asked, Obama agrees that he is “born-again,” but with the proviso that he is uncomfortable with dogmatic claims that assert that any tradition has a monopoly on truth and he sees commonalities of belief in various religions. Obama expresses worry about persons who have dogmatic religious convictions and claim to certainly know the will of God, preferring a stance that retains a degree of doubt. In personal practice, Obama has daily conversations with God, and his reflections mainly focus on the purity of his motives and maintaining his moral compass throughout the day. Obama sees how easy it could be to get caught up in what he calls the “vanity” side of politics and worries about the compromises that need to be made in order to be effective. Theologically, Obama does not believe that non-Christians go to hell, nor does he have certain convictions concerning what happens after death, or if heaven exists. Obama describes sin as “being out of alignment with my values,” and he claims that it is its own punishment, just as living his life according to his values has its own reward. He describes a personal admiration for Jesus and sees Jesus as a historical figure and teacher. When asked for good spiritual examples, Obama cites Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Abraham Lincoln as spiritual and political inspirations. Gandhi, in particular, is someone that Obama recognizes as deeply spiritual, but did not become dogmatic or intolerant of people of different faiths, which Obama attributes to having maintained some doubt about spiritual concerns. Osama bin Laden is Obama’s negative example of a person who claims to be religiously motivated, but is actually intolerant and violent.<sup>26</sup>

In the blogosphere, reaction to this interview has been mixed. Some are relieved that a Democrat expresses deeply held religious sentiments, while others state that Obama is “arrogant” for

not believing in the Bible and Christian dogma in a more fundamental way. They see his selective belief in Christian doctrine as a “postmodern” and relativistic kind of Christianity. In fact, there are web-sites that insist that Obama is wrong to claim to be a Christian at all. The Christian anti-defamation commission, a right-wing evangelical Christian organization, has put together video and web pages asserting that Obama is not truly a Christian because he believes there are many paths to religious truth, he denies the authority of the Bible, he supports homosexuality, he supports abortion, he affirms Muslim prayer, he is informed by Black liberation theology, and he does not have a true Christian testimony, or moment of conversion.<sup>27</sup>

Connected to and perhaps a motivator for his specific religious beliefs, Obama has read a great deal of theology and overall, is considered to be one of the most theologically serious presidents in American history. In particular, Obama has discussed his liking for the Yale theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, whose work he first encountered as an undergraduate at Columbia University.<sup>28</sup> In an interview with David Brooks in 2007, Brooks spontaneously asked Obama if he had read Reinhold Niebuhr’s work. Obama proceeded to state how Niebuhr was his favorite philosopher and cogently summarized his work for about 20 minutes.<sup>29</sup> Both Niebuhr and Obama share a suspicion of the egoism that a political life can promote and worry about the influence of power on the moral integrity of the politically active person. Despite the dangers and pitfalls, however, both think it is vitally important to engage politically with the world in order to promote equality amongst people. Additionally, both take a centrist approach to politics and some of Obama’s views on the relation between religion and politics can be derived from Niebuhr’s position.<sup>30</sup>

### **Obama and the Church/State Debate**

In his famous speech to the Democratic National Committee in 2004, Obama reached out to the Right by proclaiming that “we worship an awesome God in the blue states,” implicitly criticizing the dualistic thinking promoted by pundits in the culture war.<sup>31</sup> This use of religious language was not an anomaly for Obama. During the 2008 election, Obama’s campaign specifically targeted “values” voters, by holding religious based forums, reaching out to churches, allowing religious press access, and having weekly conference calls with religious leaders, including famous pastors like Rick Warren and Jim Wallis. Ultimately, Obama was able to gain more Christian votes than John Kerry, but it was not the decisive factor in his win. Obama improved over Kerry in 9 of the 15 religious categories, but only three groups, Black Protestants, Ethnic Protestants, and Traditionalist Catholics showed double digit gains.<sup>32</sup> Most of Obama’s gains occurred amongst African American Protestants, who came out in larger numbers, and constituted 20% of Obama’s voters and only 1% of McCain’s voters.<sup>33</sup> Simultaneously, Obama retained the religiously unaffiliated vote and voters from other religions, in addition to these modest increases in the Christian vote.

Reaching out to Christians has always been part of Obama’s campaigning style, but some of his Republican opponents have tried to turn Obama’s religiosity against him. In 2004, Barack Obama dealt with an incident in which his Republican senate opponent, Alan Keyes, announced that Christ would not vote for Barack Obama, mainly due to his stance on abortion and homosexual rights. Though Obama’s campaign organizers warned Obama to do nothing, since his opponent was making himself look worse with such accusations, Obama was personally offended by someone making religious attacks against him and the incident continues to serve as a touchstone for his discussion of the relation between religion and politics. He knew that he should have ignored Keyes, but Obama states that he could not help taking Keyes seriously, because he claimed to speak for his religion.<sup>34</sup> Obama summarized Keyes’ views in the following way:

America was founded on the twin principles of God-given liberty and Christian faith.

Successive liberal administrations had hijacked the federal government to serve a godless materialism and had thereby steadily chipped away—through regulation, socialistic welfare programs, gun laws, compulsory attendance at public schools, and the income tax...---at individual liberty and traditional values. Liberal judges had further contributed to this moral decay by perverting the First Amendment to mean the separation of church and state, and by validating all sorts of aberrant behavior—particularly abortion and homosexuality—that threatened to destroy the nuclear family. The answer to American renewal, then, was simple: Restore religion generally—and Christianity in particular—to its rightful place at the center of our public and private lives, align the law with religious percepts, and drastically restrict the power of the federal government to legislate in areas prescribed neither by the Constitution nor by God’s commandments.<sup>35</sup>

For Obama, this position is mistaken, but Obama recognizes that it represents the anger and frustration of some Conservatives that democratic politicians have not taken seriously. The typical liberal response would be to argue aggressively that this position is unconstitutional and that religious language and motives should be removed from politics, but Obama believes this response is equally extreme. As a centrist, Obama has critiques of both sides of the debate that have resulted in a simplistic and polarizing discussion of the issues. For Obama, “whenever we dumb down the political debate, we lose,” and he notes that there is a problem with either/or thinking that dismisses what partisans could have in common.<sup>36</sup> Obama stresses a greater need to focus on what persons have in common and overall, he discusses democracy as a conversation that needs to take place between persons who disagree.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, Obama has advice for the Left which has been consistent throughout his political career. He acknowledges that democratic politicians are fearful of engaging with religious language

and that some left-leaning intellectuals are openly hostile to religion, believing it is irrational and intolerant. Obama maintains that the Left needs to be more sympathetic to religious voices. Obama contends that Liberals are tolerant so long as persons keep their religious views to themselves, but typically, Liberals do not understand the desire for religion to be public.<sup>38</sup> In the long run, Obama states that Democrats "...have made a mistake when we fail to acknowledge the power of faith in the lives of the American people, and so avoid joining a serious debate about how to reconcile faith with our modern, pluralistic society."<sup>39</sup> Obama notes that 95% of the American people say that they believe in God, two thirds belong to a church, and 37% describe themselves as committed Christians.<sup>40</sup> Politically, it must be admitted that Christians are in the majority and that failing to engage with them or their concerns cannot be numerically sustained. When Democrats avoid religious venues or the religious press, Obama argues that others will fill that void. The effort to keep religion "private," even when a Democratic candidate is deeply religious is a misguided effort because "not every mention of God in public is a breach of the wall of separation."<sup>41</sup> Obama claims that context matters and that issues like the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance in schools do not oppress every non-believer.<sup>42</sup> Yet, Obama cautions that inauthentic use of religious devotion by Democrats would be a further mistake. Candidates, regardless of their religious status, should strive to make connections with the values that "secular" and religious persons share to build alliances between them.

Abandoning faith-based discourse is a political mistake, since the Christian voters are in the majority, but more importantly for Obama, it is also a rhetorical mistake that ignores the very public influence that Christianity has on our culture and how people understand the world. Given that most persons map their world through value-laden language, Obama believes that Democrats must engage with the language of values to make stronger cases for their arguments in moral terms.<sup>43</sup> Abandoning the language of morality has resulted in losing many voters who chose candidates based upon similar values. Showing some resemblance to Niebuhr's view, who also thinks religious language in politics

connects deeply with morality, Obama asserts that the fear of discussing religion has led the Left to vacate the language of values, even when their concerns can easily be connected to Christian beliefs. For example, racism, poverty, and the lack of universal health care are all easily connected to typical Christian concerns. Obama contends that reformers such as Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King were successful in politics and were highly motivated by their faiths. They included religious language and values within their speeches, but simultaneously pursued liberal aims.<sup>44</sup> If Liberals shed some of their prejudices, it will help the country to understand that there are values that religious and secular people share and it will help build partnerships to solve problems.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to his promotion of religious and value laden language, Obama has also defended the importance of secular principles in the past. In his 2004 interview about his religion, Obama was a staunch defender of the separation of church and state. He says:

Alongside my own deep personal faith, I am a follower, as well, of our civic religion. I am a big believer in the separation of church and state. I am a big believer in our constitutional structure. I mean, I'm a law professor at the University of Chicago teaching constitutional law. I am a great admirer of our founding charter, and its resolve to prevent theocracies from forming, and its resolve to prevent disruptive strains of fundamentalism from taking root in this country.<sup>46</sup>

In *The Audacity of Hope*, published in 2006, he gives a more theoretical defense of secular principles. His advice for evangelical or fundamentalist Christians is the need for them to recognize the value of the establishment clause and how it has been an asset to religious belief. First, Obama claims that it has preserved democracy by assuring that violent religious conflicts, which were the European norm during the founding of the country, were avoided in the United States. He points to the tendency of the Religious Right to forget the issues of sectarianism that the Constitution was

derived to counter and this need has grown all the greater as America becomes more religiously diverse. Further, Obama suggests that even if there were only Christian Americans, and no other types of believers, it would be impossible to decide how this nation is Christian since denominations vary greatly. Obama asks “ Whose Christianity would we teach in schools? James Dobson’s or Al Sharpton’s?”<sup>47</sup> Rather than being feared, Obama believes that the doctrine of separation of church and state protects churches as well as the state, by keeping government away from religion and allowing a myriad of different kinds of religion to develop.<sup>48</sup> The establishment clause has produced a robust religious practice in America, insuring that religion has thrived rather than declined, like it has a tendency to do when it is compelled by the state.<sup>49</sup> Finally, Obama claims that those who argue that the United States was founded as a Christian nation are mistaken because the founders disagreed profoundly about religion, making claims concerning the original intent of the founders suspect.<sup>50</sup>

Obama’s solution to this vexing problem is centrist. Progressives are wrong when they ask religious persons to leave their faith at the door, and Liberals need to recognize that not every mention of God in public is a problem.<sup>51</sup> Right-leaning Christians, on the other hand, must translate their political concerns into a universal language that can be understood by all, and “...amenable to reason.”<sup>52</sup> For Obama, the solution is not for persons of faith to give up that faith, but to translate those faith based reasons into language that is more universal and that others of differing beliefs can understand. Obama recognizes that it is difficult to translate one’s reasons into universal values, but in a pluralistic society, there is no other choice.<sup>53</sup> Obama’s call is for compromise when possible and persuasion, rather than violence, when it is impossible.<sup>54</sup>

Throughout *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama stresses the importance of more civil discourse and sympathetic understanding of one another. He begins and ends his chapter on faith with examples of voters from the Left and the Right with whom he opposes on some policy issues, but who provided valuable lessons on how to respectfully disagree and how to move toward the center to

reach consensus. First, he recalls the story of a Doctor who is against abortion and gay rights, but nonetheless, agreed with Obama over other issues, like the war in Iraq. This voter was turned off by strong language on the Obama web site concerning “right-wing ideologues who want to take away a woman’s right to choose,” and asked Obama to be more fair-minded, particularly, if he wanted to have his vote. Obama had his staff remove this phrase from his web site in an effort to be more civil with those with whom he disagrees on principle. He ends the chapter with a story of a same-sex marriage advocate who disagrees with Obama’s position that favors civil unions. This woman was hurt by Obama’s defense of his political position that was based upon his religious beliefs. Obama was reminded that he must remain open to the idea that his position is wrong, just as his defense of abortion rights may also be wrong. Obama claims the one must leave room for doubt and “...be continually open to new revelations—whether they come from a lesbian friend or a doctor opposed to abortion.”<sup>55</sup>

Obama’s position is complex and has some helpful advice for partisans in the church/state debate. Up until 2006, Obama made a strong case for correctives that need to occur on both sides and he supported the idea of making the debate more complex and less superficial. However, since his presidential run, one side of this debate has been given more direct public attention. This trend is signaled by an editorial that Obama wrote in the *Chicago Tribune* in July of 2006 that contains some concrete practical advice for the Democrats and reiterates some of his ideas from *The Audacity of Hope*. As a pragmatic politician, Obama thinks that positive engagements with religion are needed. In this editorial, Obama calls upon Democrats to stop discussing religion in negative terms, like debating where and when it can be practiced, and start engaging it positively in order to reclaim it, and the voters who vote from a religious point of view. Obama charges that the typical democratic response that praises the separation of church and state was taking the bait that the Republicans had dangled in front of them.<sup>56</sup> After this editorial, Obama no longer broadcasts his defense of the principle of separation of church and state. His position concerning its importance can still be

discovered by reading *The Audacity of Hope*, but his oral defense of this idea has ceased. The more complex conversation that he recommends is desperately needed in *The Audacity of Hope*, has yet to occur.

Since Obama's election, his administration has made overtures to please the Religious Right as well as the Secular Left. For the Right, Obama has very clearly demonstrated a willingness to discuss religion and faith and use religious and value-laden language to make a case for his political beliefs. Surprisingly, it has been charged that Obama has used the term "Jesus Christ" far more frequently than George W. Bush in his high profile speeches.<sup>5758</sup> Obama's inauguration began with a controversial gesture to the Right, when he invited Rick Warren, an opponent of same sex marriage, as the pastor to perform the inauguration invocation.<sup>59</sup> Rather than ending Bush's office of faith based initiatives, the Obama administration renamed and expanded the office to the Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and he has yet to decide whether agencies that receive faith-based grants can discriminate when hiring. Recently, he made a case for health care by not only going to the general media, but also by making a case to religious leaders as well.<sup>60</sup> Overall, he has lived his idea that religion and discussion of values can be expressed publicly and he has not avoided such talk in the interest of maintaining a separation of church and state.

For the "secular" Left, the gains have been more modest. Obama has described the nation as not strictly a Christian nation, but it is also a Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, and a nation of non-believers.<sup>61</sup> The "non-believers" label is an important one, because other executives have not used it. He has also scaled back on the National day of Prayer by holding no formal events, and he has tried to be more inclusive of non-Christian religions and of non-believers generally. However, Obama has taken his own advice from his editorial and declined to discuss or defend the separation of church and state as a principle, or make a case for why Conservative Christians should be accepting of it. Obviously, Obama is more concerned with retaining the support of the Christian majority and, perhaps, leaving

the more complicated discussion for a future date. So far, we have lost the complexity of his view. As Daryl Hart notes, the word “secularism” has become a “scare” word to some Christians in the United States who take it to mean anti-religious or the opposite of religious.<sup>62</sup> Since “secularism” has become a pejorative word amongst many Christians in recent years, Obama may be the man who could bring it back into a positive light by discussing it in a complex and sympathetic way. Remaining silent on the issue, however, signals a missed opportunity and many more years of divisiveness to come.

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<sup>1</sup> In scholarly discourse there is no consensus concerning the definition of the term “secular.” For purposes of this paper, I am using the term in a broad and general sense, to refer to persons who believe that there should not be an established religion in the United States and that this involves some type of separation of church and state. In further research, I hope to examine the concept in much more detail.

<sup>2</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 51.

<sup>3</sup> I am using the term “religion” to refer to Christian Conservatives in this instance, as is common in the media discussion of this issue.

<sup>4</sup> Domke and Coe 33-34.

<sup>5</sup> Domke and Coe 105.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Pew forum on Religion and Public Life, Evangelical Protestants are composed of the following groups which vary in denominational beliefs:

**10.8%            Baptist, Evang. Trad.**

6.7%	Southern Baptist Convention
2.5%	Independent Baptist in the Evangelical Tradition
< 0.3%	Baptist Missionary Association
< 0.3%	Free Will Baptist
< 0.3%	General Association of Regular Baptists
< 0.3%	Other Baptist denomination in the Evangelical Tradition
0.9%	Baptist in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified

**< 0.3%            Methodist, Evang. Trad.**

**3.4%            Nondenominational, Evang. Trad.**

1.2%	Nondenominational evangelical
0.5%	Nondenominational charismatic
0.3%	Nondenominational fundamentalist
< 0.3%	Nondenominational Christian
0.5%	Interdenominational in the Evangelical Tradition
< 0.3%	Community Church in the Evangelical Tradition
< 0.3%	Other nondenominational group in the Evangelical Tradition
0.8%	Nondenominational in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified

**1.8%            Lutheran, Evang. Trad.**

1.4%	Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod
< 0.3%	Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Synod
< 0.3%	Other Lutheran denomination in the Evangelical Tradition
< 0.3%	Lutheran in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified

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**0.8%**

**Presbyterian, Evang. Trad.**

0.4% Presbyterian Church in America  
< 0.3% Other Presbyterian denomination in the Evangelical Tradition  
< 0.3% Presbyterian in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified

**3.4%**

**Pentecostal, Evang. Trad.**

1.4% Assemblies of God  
0.4% Church of God Cleveland Tennessee  
< 0.3% Four Square Gospel  
< 0.3% Pentecostal Church of God  
< 0.3% Pentecostal Holiness Church  
< 0.3% Nondenominational, Independent Pentecostal  
< 0.3% Church of God of the Apostolic Faith  
< 0.3% Apostolic Pentecostal in the Evangelical Tradition  
< 0.3% Other Pentecostal denomination in the Evangelical Tradition  
0.7% Pentecostal in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified

**< 0.3%**

**Anglican/Episcopal, Evang. Trad.**

**1.7%**

**Restorationist, Evang. Trad.**

1.5% Church of Christ  
< 0.3% Christian Churches and Churches of Christ  
< 0.3% Restorationist in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified

**< 0.3%**

**Congregationalist, Evang. Trad.**

< 0.3% Conservative Congregational Christian  
< 0.3% Other Congregationalist denomination in the Evangelical Tradition  
< 0.3% Congregationalist in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified

**1.0%**

**Holiness, Evang. Trad.**

0.3% Church of the Nazarene  
0.3% Free Methodist Church  
< 0.3% Wesleyan Church  
< 0.3% Christian and Missionary Alliance  
< 0.3% Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)  
< 0.3% Other Holiness denomination in the Evangelical Tradition  
< 0.3% Holiness in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified

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<b>&lt; 0.3%</b>	<b>Reformed, Evang. Trad.</b>
< 0.3%	Christian Reformed Church
< 0.3%	Other Reformed denomination in the Evangelical Tradition
< 0.3%	Reformed in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified
<b>0.5%</b>	<b>Adventist, Evang. Trad.</b>
0.4%	Seventh-Day Adventist
< 0.3%	Other Adventist group in the Evangelical Tradition
<b>&lt; 0.3%</b>	<b>Anabaptist, Evang. Trad.</b>
<b>&lt; 0.3%</b>	<b>Pietist, Evang. Trad.</b>
<b>0.3%</b>	<b>Other Evangelical/Fundamentalist</b>
<b>1.9%</b>	<b>Protestant nonspecific, Evang. Trad.</b>

<sup>7</sup> Seven out of ten voters routinely tell pollsters that they want their president to have strong personal faith (“Crises”). This is especially alarming since many voters believe that public professions of faith are an indication of having strong moral values and a quality that many weight highly when voting.

Interestingly, the more overt discussion of religion and religious issues by a candidate is a poor indicator of the success of the presidency, as well as the personal morality of the candidates, or what policies they will advocate in office. Randal Balmer, in his book *God and the White House*, has argued that this voting strategy is a form of “cheap grace.” Balmer contends that it is disturbing that religious rhetoric by candidates results in votes, particularly since it does not indicate what kind of president that person will be, whether he will be seen as successful and effective, or whether he will be viewed as a moral leader. Balmer points out that some of the leaders who may have had the deepest moral convictions and ability to stand on principle were viewed as the most ineffective presidents, like Jimmy Carter. In fact, Carter’s staff believes that he kept more than two hundred campaign promises, which is a higher number than any other president in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but he was still perceived to be ineffective. Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon based upon his religious convictions of mercy and forgiveness, but it probably lost him the next election. Bill Clinton, was seen as effective, but lacking in personal moral integrity. Therefore, although voters are moved by language of faith and principles during the candidacy, they do not necessarily admire executives who cling to their moral convictions in office (Balmer 155-173). Gary Scott Smith agrees that the presidents with the highest personal integrity are often viewed as the least effective, like John Quincy Adams, Herbert Hoover, and Jimmy Carter (428).

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<sup>8</sup> Todd and Gawiser 40.

<sup>9</sup> Sullivan 88,126.

<sup>10</sup> Sullivan 94-5,207.

<sup>11</sup> Sullivan 83.

<sup>12</sup> Sullivan 83-84, Balmer 139.

<sup>13</sup> Sullivan 105.

<sup>14</sup> Sullivan 116-117.

<sup>15</sup> Bergin.

<sup>16</sup> Gibbs and Duffy.

<sup>17</sup> Bergin.

<sup>18</sup> Green 47.

<sup>19</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 205.

<sup>20</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 204.

<sup>21</sup> Obama, *Dreams* 500.

<sup>22</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 204.

<sup>23</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 207.

<sup>24</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 208.

<sup>25</sup> Obama, *Dreams* 452.

<sup>26</sup> Falsani, Barack.

<sup>27</sup> “Seven Reasons Barack Obama is Not a Christian.” Needless to say, some of these reasons lack credibility.

<sup>28</sup> Copeland.

<sup>29</sup> Brooks. Interestingly, both John McCain and Hilary Clinton have direct references to Niebuhr in their books (Julian 21).

<sup>30</sup> On the issue of religion and politics, Niebuhr thinks that both sides of the debate, those who think religion should be excluded from politics and those who claim that American is a Christian nation, have certain flaws. Niebuhr believes that historically, religion has been used to cultivate internal perspective concerning moral and spiritual behavior, which is necessary to make national and international exchanges more moral. The “secular” advocates are mistaken because religion can be a powerful source to counter egoistic impulses and help to provide means through which larger groups can examine their selfish impulses. Religion, not politics, can deal with the individual soul in addition to the goal of a just world for Niebuhr. However, some citizens, who are working from a Christian framework, are also at fault according to Niebuhr and need to be mindful of the dogmatism of their claims because there is a tendency

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for religious persons to “...obscure the shades and shadows of moral life,” by contrasting good with evil in a simplistic manner. Instead of being humble, religious persons can become dogmatic and arrogant in their convictions. Particularly, Niebuhr is critical of some notions of American exceptionalism which claim a fraudulent divine majesty for America. According to Niebuhr, God does not play favorites and the will of God is impossible to know conclusively. Additionally, the Christian believer tends to make the further error of blaming the increased secularity of a society for the all the failings of the community, assuming that God’s desires can be known in detailed and specific ways. For Niebuhr, God does not cling to a particular form of social organization and the belief that he does, distracts the Christian from pursuing actual concrete justice (*Moral Man and Immoral Society*).

<sup>31</sup> Obama, *Dreams* 451.

<sup>32</sup> Green 45,47.

<sup>33</sup> Green 44.

<sup>34</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 211.

<sup>35</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 211-212.

<sup>36</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 40.

<sup>37</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 92.

<sup>38</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 213.

<sup>39</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 213-214.

<sup>40</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 198.

<sup>41</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 221.

<sup>42</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 221.

<sup>43</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 214. Obama is careful to note that morality and religion are separate things and that moral value language is not dependent upon religion.

<sup>44</sup> Obama in Olive, 172.

<sup>45</sup> Obama in Olive, 173-4.

<sup>46</sup> Falsani, Barack.

<sup>47</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 218.

<sup>48</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 37.

<sup>49</sup> Obama in Olive, 175.

<sup>50</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 90.

<sup>51</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 221.

<sup>52</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 219.

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<sup>53</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 219.

<sup>54</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 222.

<sup>55</sup> Obama, *Audacity* 195-224.

<sup>56</sup> Obama, *Religious*.

<sup>57</sup> Javers.

<sup>58</sup> Some believe that Obama's common use of the term "Jesus Christ" is in part an educational move targeted at the 11% of the population who still believe Obama is Muslim (Javers).

<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, some Conservatives were upset that Warren agreed to participate in the inaugural of a pro-choice candidate (Green 42).

<sup>60</sup> Hefland.

<sup>61</sup> Obama, *Inaugural* 10.

<sup>62</sup> Hart, 240