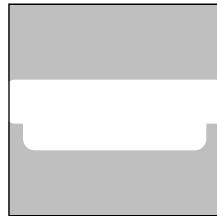


Religion
and
American
Politics:
The 2000
Election in
Context

Edited by
Mark Silk

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Contents

Contributors	vii
Introduction	
Mark Silk	1
1. Locating Religion in American Politics	
John Wilson	7
2. Religion and Politics in the 1990s: Confrontations and Coalitions	
John C. Green.	19
3. The Press v. the Pulpit: State and Local Coverage of the Religious Factor in Politics	
Mark Rozell.	41
4. Social Movements and Religion in Contemporary American Politics	
Rhys H. Williams	52
5. Pietists and Pluralists: Religion and American Politicians	
Michael Kazin.	63
6. Religion and the Law in American Politics	
Marci A. Hamilton	75

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Introduction

Mark Silk

The 1998 midterm election and Congress's subsequent failure to convict President Clinton of a high crime or misdemeanor mark a turning point in America's religious politics—or so it looks at the moment.

Nineteen-eighty saw the emergence of the Christian right—a carefully wrought political movement that helped put Ronald Reagan into the White House and send a clutch of liberal Democratic senators into retirement. The movement was animated by a belief that the majority of Americans were moral if not religious folks who opposed “abortion on demand” and “the gay lifestyle,” supported tough justice and prayer in school, and expected all able-bodied citizens to work for a living.

During the 1980s, evangelical Protestant activists became the shock troops of an invigorated Republican coalition, and traditionalist white evangelicals became the most Republican religious voting bloc in the country. The expectation was that the appeal of moral reform and smaller government would soon persuade American voters to make the GOP the country's majority party. When both houses of Congress fell into Republican hands in 1994, it appeared to have done just that.

Just four years later, the electorate was no longer with the program. Against both historical precedent and immediate expectations, the GOP lost seats in the House of Representatives, and Republican candidates running with strong Christian right support lost important statewide races in the South and Midwest. Worst of all, the great moral imperative of removing President Clinton from office proved incapable of winning the support of more than a third of Americans. Even traditionalist white evangelicals favored impeachment to the tune of only 55 percent.

After the president's acquittal, longtime conservative activist Paul Weyrich concluded that the “whole strategy” had been a mistake because it was based on the false premise that “a majority of Americans basically agree with our point of view.” According to Weyrich, the country had suffered a “cultural collapse” of such proportions that politics could not reverse it. Without rejecting political participation as a means of self-defense, he called on religious conservatives to quarantine themselves from the morally polluted American mainstream by creating their own separate educational and cultural institutions.

In a related key, syndicated columnist Cal Thomas and Michigan pastor Ed

Dobson, once comrades-in-arms in the Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, published a *nostra culpa*, *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America?* arguing that Christian conservatives had sold their souls for a mess of political pottage. "After 20 years, there's a nearly complete failure of the religious right to change anything substantial in this country," Thomas told Michelle Bearden of the Tampa Tribune "We went about it all wrong. We looked to Washington to change our lives, instead of looking at our own hearts. We ignored that change has to come from within."

While the Weyrich-Thomas-Dobson summons to disengagement drew vigorous dissent from other Christian right leaders, a strategic re-positioning was clearly under way. In the 1996 presidential campaign, the then executive director of the Christian Coalition, Ralph Reed, had been pilloried by fellow Christian rightists for trying to broker a deal permitting GOP presidential candidate Bob Dole to dance away from his party's embrace of a constitutional ban on abortion. On the road to 2000, barely a peep went up when the early GOP frontrunner, Texas governor George W. Bush, did just such a dance, saying the country was "not yet" ready for such a ban.

The Christian Coalition itself seemed to be coming apart at the seams. With Reed now in business for himself as a political consultant (to Bush among others), the Christian right's standard-bearing organization seemed incapable of finding capable leadership as it sought to retire a mountain of debt and redefine its mission. While other, less prominent, conservative religious lobbies were out and about, increasingly the movement as a whole looked less like a wild political animal than a house pet—requiring plenty of care and feeding, to be sure, but thoroughly domesticated.

Yet anyone expecting the retreat of the Christian right to signal a withdrawal of religion itself from the national political stage proved badly mistaken. Hardly had the 2000 campaign begun than Bush, most of the rest of the early Republican flock, and Vice President Al Gore were testifying to their faith more vociferously than any presidential aspirants in living memory. To be sure, it is not easy to disengage true piety from true politicking. But whatever the extent of their personal spiritual commitments, the aspirants showed no fear that personal testimonials would alienate the voters. Equally if not more important, religion occupied a prominent place at the policy table.

As visitors to <http://www.georgewbush.com> could readily see, a pillar of the Texas governor's campaign of "compassionate conservatism" was providing government support to help religiously affiliated institutions address social problems. Under the heading of "faith in action," the web page laid out Bush's "faith-based" state initiatives in childcare, alcohol and drug treatment, and prison programs, as well as his vigorous enforcement of the "charitable choice" provision of the welfare reform act of 1996. "Government should welcome the help of faith-based institutions," said Bush. "Church and state should work together with respect for our differences and reverence for our shared goals."

For his part, the Vice President embraced the ideology of charitable choice in remarks at the Salvation Army's headquarters in Atlanta in May, calling for the faith-based approach to be expanded from welfare-related programs to address homelessness, youth violence, and drug addiction. "If you elect me your president," said Gore, "the voices of faith-based organizations will be integral to the policies set forth in my administration."

All this did not come out of nowhere. Although it has barely been remarked upon, a major feature of the Clinton years has been the welcoming of religion into public life and public policy. Indeed, a case can be made that Bill Clinton has been the most religion-friendly president since Eisenhower, and perhaps of all time.

Early in his first term, Clinton signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a bill designed to reverse the Supreme Court's 1990 decision in *Smith v. Employment Division* which limited plaintiffs' access to constitutional protection for free exercise rights. (Meeting with reporters some months later, he criticized the news media for ignoring the bill, saying it "affected the lives of people in a profound way.") Charitable choice, introduced into the welfare reform act by Sen. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.), has enjoyed the president's philosophical support. In 1995, the White House published guidelines for religion in the public schools that take a distinctively accommodationist approach. In a revised set of the guidelines issued at the end of 1999, Clinton used his weekly radio address to urge schools to actively invite churches and religious organizations to become partners in a wide array of programs during and after school, including school safety, student literacy, and discipline. "Finding a proper place for faith in our schools is a complex and emotional matter for many Americans," he said. "But I have never believed the Constitution required our schools to be religion-free zones, or that our children must check their faith at the schoolhouse door."

On the foreign policy front, congressional aides whose job it is to work for the release of individuals imprisoned for religious reasons say they have received more support from the Clinton White House than from previous administrations. Likewise, the White House signed off on—and the President signed—the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, which put religious persecution at the top of the U.S. human rights agenda.

It is not remarkable that this religion agenda has slipped under the public's radar. To the extent that the news media have paid attention to faith-based legislation, it has been to the failure of the Christian right to get its issues through—notably anti-abortion bills and a constitutional amendment to restore prayer in public schools. The big story of welfare reform was the end of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, not charitable choice, which at the time went unheralded even by its enthusiasts.

The President, moreover, has generally seemed to play his religion cards defensively—in response to the more aggressively religious agenda of the

Christian right—and in the process has been a master at disarming fears of religious exclusivity that the Christian right has raised in spades. He is, himself, highly sensitive to the spiritual sensibilities of others. Announcing his bombing of alleged terrorist targets in the Sudan and Afghanistan early in 1998, he went out of his way to say that this was not intended as an assault on Islam. The Jewish community has not overlooked the number of Jewish appointments by the administration, from its two Supreme Court appointees to secretaries of the Labor, Treasury, Agriculture, and the National Security Advisor. Finally, it has been difficult to square the president's evident enthusiasm for religion with his even more evident personal moral failings, although even the most cursory reading of the Hebrew Bible should give the lie to any notion that personal moral failings are inconsistent with religious faith.

Thanks in no small measure to Clinton's ability to define a broadly acceptable middle ground, it has been possible over the past eight years to detect a consensus growing across party lines on the virtues of religion in a society that has seemed to many to have lost its moral footing. Liberals as well as conservatives praise the work of urban activists like the Rev. Eugene Rivers, a Pentecostal pastor who works to reclaim the lives of troubled youth in Boston. Even the most loyal parts of the Democratic coalition—Jews and African Americans—are no longer as orthodox as they once were in their opposition to public vouchers for religious schools. So as the first president elected in the new millennium slouches toward the Oval Office, a chastened Christian right and a more religiously engaged center and left seem to be creating a new kind of religious politics in America. It is the purpose of the present volume to help journalists (and other interested parties) make sense of it.

In the fall of 1998, the contributors gathered for a planning session in Hartford. To help understand what journalists might find most helpful, we were fortunate to have on hand Robert Kaiser, associate editor of the *Washington Post* and Brian Toolan, editor of the *Hartford Courant*. Initial drafts were distributed at a conference on religion and American politics held at Trinity in April attended by some two dozen journalists from news organizations around the country. What follows has benefited from the discussion that took place at the conference, as well as from the passage of the critical first few months of the 2000 election cycle.

The goal is to orient journalists to religion in American politics today—a moving target if ever there was one. Thus, in an important reinterpretation, John Wilson argues that because the framers of the Constitution punted the question of church-state separation to the states rather than follow Madison's lead, they left the country with a legacy of considerable uncertainty when it comes to questions of religious establishments. John Green provides the most up-to-date summary available of the voting habits and preferences of the country's major religious voting blocs, including those who identify themselves as nonreligious. Mark Rozell's look at Christian right activists and their relation

to journalists reveals both the strengths and the shortcomings of news coverage of religious politics at the present transitional moment. Rhys Williams sketches an exceptionally useful way to make sense of the ups and downs of the organizations that organize and manage the country's religious politics. Because politicians are religious actors in their own right, Michael Kazin offers a framework for understanding why they talk and behave the way they do. Finally, Marci Hamilton sketches the legal and legislative terms within which religion is currently operating.

All of our contributors are leading scholars in their fields, which comprise history (Wilson, Kazin), sociology (Williams), political science (Green, Rozell), and law (Hamilton). Hamilton, like many law professors, is also a practitioner; and in that capacity she represented the City of Boerne, Texas, before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Boerne v. Flores* in which the Court overturned the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. To say that in the process she herself became a controversial player in the religious politics of our time is an understatement.

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Locating Religion in American Politics

John F. Wilson

We start with a basic observation: There is no end in sight to the expression of political positions or objectives, including divisive ones, through religious ideals and idioms. How can this be, especially in the United States? Conventional wisdom holds that the Constitution solved, or at least resolved, the ancient problem of religiously based political conflict through its provision for a “wall of separation between church and state.” But the conventional wisdom is mistaken.

The Constitution proper almost entirely avoids religion, and the supplementary “religion clauses” of the First Amendment, as written, simply disallow federal engagement with it. The wall metaphor does incorporate earlier political discussions from the colonial era, but it was introduced as an interpretation only during a barbed partisan exchange early in the 19th century. In truth, the Framers postponed the politics of religion, or what in shorthand is termed the problem of church and state, treating it in certain respects like slavery. And that is the fundamental reason the issue remains problematic in the American polity well into our third century as a nation.

The Framers punted when confronted with the task of explicitly defining the place of religion in their new nation because, for them, the Constitution was a last chance to bring the quarrelsome former colonies into a political structure that would prove to be durable. Their objective was to construct a political system that cleared the requisite threshold to make the new nation viable. The strategy was to attend to the most critical challenges—those that would bring the new nation to grief if they were not adequately addressed. First among these was conducting foreign relations and collaborating in defense against external threats. Closely allied to these was achieving a framework to encourage and sustain commerce. By contrast, prescribing the place of religion in the political culture was among the issues of least moment. Disagreement about how religion should be treated entailed the possibility of bringing the entire effort to grief. To put it baldly, if they had proposed a formal solution to this ancient problem for the proposed United States, their draft effort would almost certainly have failed ratification.

As the Framers worked in secret to craft their proposed Constitution, they faced numerous dilemmas. The more obvious ones concerned balancing the claims of former colonies against each other while providing for their common interests. The mixed form of government they proposed—drawing power

from the people as well as through the constituent states, institutionalizing and circumscribing the executive, legislative, and judicial dimensions of government—continues to be remarkably durable. Not that these men (without exception) of the Enlightenment (to varying degrees) were prescient in all things. It seems entirely to have eluded them, for example, that political parties would play a central and critical role in governing the United States.

Yet, faced with the desperate necessity of achieving “a more perfect union,” the Framers did have the wisdom to recognize that their reach must not exceed their grasp. The powers of the new government would be limited; by design, ranges of social activities would remain independent of it. For instance, the draft constitution was silent on the topic of education, and the reason is clear. Education was a dimension of cultural activity that developed differentially within the separate colonies. An attempt to set out or require comparable educational institutions in all of the states, or even to provide for the regulation of those that existed, would have assured rejection of this draft constitution as intruding on the business of the states.

Just as the draft Constitution for the United States was silent with regard to education, a relatively undeveloped aspect of the early nation, so it was for all intents and purposes silent with respect to religion, a very significantly developed dimension. To be sure, the draft did include a provision, in Article VI, that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” More importantly, however, the national government was given no authority to control or regulate religion in any way in the new United States. Supervisory control over religion fell under the unenumerated powers that were reserved to the States.

This was a radical position for men of the 18th century to take. Virtually all of the states that would comprise the new nation provided for religion in one fashion or another. Their provisions often took the form of privileging a particular religious body, and might entail exacting civil penalties for those who failed to conform to it. The draft Constitution required loyalty to the United States on the part of office holders in the uniting states, but it did not tell the States to change their own provisions for religion. It distanced itself from this topic in a calculated way.

None of the Framers personally dismissed religion. They held a range of religious convictions, and were active (to varying degrees) in different denominations. Understanding religion to be differentiated in its manifestations, they practiced it according to their own lights while respecting the commitments of others. They did not think that the new national government should be formally dependent upon religion to cultivate the loyalties of citizens and gambled that religious institutions and activities could be separated from state functions. They believed that, at least in the American context, this radical experiment would be required if the new nation were to survive, let alone flourish. A presumably unintended consequence of their position was that reli-

gion itself would flourish when detached from government.

How, then, did religion come to feature so prominently in the Bill of Rights? The text constructed at Philadelphia was sent to all 13 states, and each was invited to review and ratify the document. While the terms of review required that the draft constitution either be accepted or rejected, many ratifying conventions raised questions about various issues, including religion. In the end, a vote of ratification often carried an understanding that, if the Constitution gained the necessary approval of two-thirds of the states, the First Congress would take up the criticisms and suggestions, and propose such formal amendments as seemed appropriate.

Congress took little if any notice of the reservations expressed in the state ratifying conventions until its first session was winding down. Then, James Madison combined the approximately 180 separate proposals into 19, including the following four that dealt with religion:

- 1) Civil rights should not be abridged on account of religious belief or worship;
- 2) There should be no national establishment of a religion;
- 3) Actions of conscience (religious belief or worship) should not be infringed;
- 4) The constituent states must respect the equal rights of conscience.

These provisions are a far cry from the eventual “religion clauses” of the First Amendment (“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”) and, for that matter, subsequent constitutional law. The second does suggest the familiar establishment clause; however, the latter goes much further, altogether denying Congress the power to legislate positively or negatively with respect to any existing or potential establishment(s) of religion in the states as well as the nation. The first concerns civil rights under the federal government—not under those of the states—and provides that they should stand entirely independent of religion; in other words, national political privileges should not be linked to religious affiliation or activities. Finally, the third and fourth would have secured the “rights of conscience” against violation by either the federal government or the states, and they find no echoes in the final text of the First Amendment. If the Constitution had been amended to include these summary provisions, it would have provided an altogether remarkable and comprehensive ground plan, fully articulating the ideal place for religion under the new nation’s government.

As Madison envisioned the process of amendment, each of the provisions endorsed by Congress and eventually ratified by the states would have been placed within the body of the original Constitution under the relevant sections and headings. Thus, the first three of the four above provisions would have been added to Article I, Section 8, which enumerates and delineates those specific powers granted to the legislative branch of government. The last, as a lim-

itation on the constituent states, would have been added to Article I, Section 10. They would thus have joined the ban on religious tests for office as five separate texts relating to religion in the Constitution. Madison at least appears to have recognized religion as a complex reality within the broader matrix of society that required constitutional attention in several different dimensions—beliefs, behaviors, etc. While the strategy he proposed for amending the Constitution came to grief at the hands of Congress, his insight into the complicated relationship of religion to the polity is noteworthy.

Taking up Madison's compilation, Congress decided not to insert the amendments into the original Constitution but to group them at the end as an addendum: the Bill of Rights. And although some of the Madisonian texts show comparatively little intervention by congressional committees, those relating to religion underwent radical recasting in both House and Senate. What had been four separate if interrelated and reinforcing provisions became, in the end, a single construct joined to other "rights" (viz. speech, the press, assembly, and redress of grievances). Deleted altogether was the notion that the federal government would require the states to respect "rights of conscience." For that matter, the formulation that emerged from the committees of the two houses and was eventually accepted in conference abandoned both the linkage between civil rights and religious liberty, and positive federal protection for the rights of conscience. Finally, the provision barring a national religious establishment was significantly refracted in the committee's formulation.

The amendment eventually offered to the states for ratification stated the purpose of prohibiting Congress from legislating about religion, even as the original Constitution forbade religious tests for holding federal offices. But the real objective, as the dynamics of the committee deliberation and drafting make clear, was to retain for the states freedom of action and practice with respect to religion, a power especially dear to New England. Far from establishing religious liberty as a basic right, the redrafted amendment served to emphasize that religion was sufficiently contentious that disengagement was the new federal republic's best approach. The amendment thus codified the idea that government should be powerless with respect to one of the strongest cultural forces at play in the new nation.

Volumes have been written attributing virtually a metaphysical significance to the First Amendment, as if its conventional placement as the initial addendum to the Constitution attested to its profound political significance. In fact, on the list of amendments circulated to the states for ratification this text actually stood third, preceded by provisions relating to the composition of Congress. It was only because these first two failed to be ratified that this third amendment became the First Amendment. No doubt freedom of speech and assembly, joined intimately to liberty for religious association and exercise, not to speak of a free press, have played fundamental roles in the political culture that has given life to our polity. But the contingencies of drafting and of ratifi-

cation ought to make us suspicious of any argument that the Founders believed with one mind that these were the Constitution's fundamental provisions. At least with respect to religion, the best they thought they could do was to segregate it from the polity of the new nation, leaving the constituent states free to handle it as they would.

Making the new United States neutral with respect to religion, however, should not be confused with neutralizing religion. The new national government effectively presupposed that "factions," including those united by idealistic objectives (such as advancing the millennial kingdom) as well as by materialistic ones (e.g., a rage for paper money), would energize the political culture—provided, as Madison wisely counseled in Federalist 10 they were effectively controlled. The religion clauses of the First Amendment, opaque as they may be, should therefore be understood as shaped by the idea that, rather than controlling religion directly, the polity ought to diffuse or limit the potentially negative effects of religion while also capturing the benefits from its undoubted influence. So described, this identifies a dynamic process rather than a static outcome. Of course, in its operation across two centuries, the constitutional regime has assigned much more specific content to the particular provisions about religion than the founding generation could have anticipated.

By design, the new Constitution forced back upon the states issues that were believed to be matters of "state's rights." Salient among these was the power of the states to regulate religion, and in fact the separate state legal systems included widely differing provisions regarding it. Virginia had recently disestablished the former Church of England and positively established religious liberty under legislation especially valued by Thomas Jefferson. By contrast, Massachusetts and Connecticut privileged their local Congregational bodies. Within a few decades, support for the New England "establishments" of religion (duly protected against federal authority by the final version of the First Amendment) eroded. First in Connecticut (1819) and then in Massachusetts (1833), a relatively free market began to develop for religious denominations. But related provisions, like those punishing blasphemy, were woven into the states' legal systems, and led to periodic prosecution of essentially religious questions in those courts. Very simply put, there was no recourse to federal law for the protection of the free exercise of religion, nor for the protection of civil privileges, nor for attacking—or supporting—religious establishments in the states.

In principle, the beginning of the modern national era with respect to federal legal provisions for religion traces to the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment following the Civil War in 1868. Textbooks call this the "second American Revolution" because in its implications it represented the radical commitment to become one nation rather than to continue functioning as a group of federated states. The Fourteenth Amendment's "due process" and "equal protection" clauses held the promise that eventually any "rights"

embedded in the national legal system would be directly applicable to citizens in all of the states. This “nationalizing” of rights was conceived in terms of access to civil privileges, such as voting, but by extension any of the rights enumerated in the Constitution might become universally accessible. But this process of “incorporation” took time, and with respect to the provisions of the First Amendment regarding religion it worked deliberately.

The Supreme Court did not rule the free-exercise clause applicable to states and other governmental authorities until 1940 (in *Cantwell v. Connecticut*) and it was six years later (in *Everson v. Board of Education*) that it did the same for the establishment clause. In doing so, the Court elected to find the meaning of these clauses in Virginia’s experience with religion—even though in the drafting and ratifying of the Bill of Rights that state’s position had been rejected in favor of formulations that bowed to the interests of Connecticut and Massachusetts.

In the last half century, litigation about religion has continued unabated, albeit in confused and confusing ways. Broad lines of development that seemed secure have been challenged and struck down (such as the implications in a “wall of separation” or in “religious liberty” as a protected sphere of action). Indeed, a significant volume of litigation that concerns religion continues to take place in state courts, where legislative and/or constitutional provisions manifest a regional complexion or provide advantage for particular causes.

It is a cheap observation that intellectual gymnastics are required to transform a ban on congressional legislation prohibiting religious free exercise into a positive protection of it. It requires an even greater stretch of the imagination to move confidently from a prohibition of congressional legislation about religious establishment(s) to making determinations worthy of a Solomon about whether or not, for example, to permit federal financing for special education programs in private schools or to outlaw displays making religious reference on public property. Under the circumstances it is tempting to recall, perhaps wistfully, Madison’s four proposed amendments, which offered a degree of coherence and consistency sadly lacking in the current jurisprudence of church and state. But if the Framers failed to endorse or accept Madison’s judicious resolution of an ancient issue, they rightly made room for religion to operate in American political culture, and indeed within the social fabric of the nation. And to those additional strands of our story we now turn.

The social history of religion in the United States is complex, confused, and dynamic. The original thirteen states fell into three broad religious blocs. The southern set, led by Virginia, had been strongly influenced in the colonial era by the Church of England. This indigenized Anglicanism granted unusual authority and influence to layfolk. But even in laicized form it faced strong competition from more evangelical groups like Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, especially in backcountry areas removed from the tidewater. The New England bloc was more religiously homogeneous, generally sup-

porting Congregational “standing orders,” if increasingly penetrated by dissenters on the right (Episcopal insurgents) and the left (Baptists, Quakers, and Separate Congregationalists). The Middle Colonies were just that, incorporating a great range of religious traditions unevenly grouped (including all of the above but adding Catholics, Dutch Reformed, Lutherans, Mennonites, and Quakers as well, to name only a few of the traditions present in varying numbers). In deferring to the reality of these plural religious communities in the 18th century, the constitutional regime made possible the remarkable expansion of pluralism in succeeding eras and its full flowering in our own.

If the relatively restricted religious pluralism of the founding period helps to explain the reluctance of the Framers to privilege any specific group(s), it also describes a great opportunity for domestic missions. The various religious forces undertook to evangelize the new nation, systematically working to build influence for their groups in the new lands opening toward the west as well as in the coastal settlements of the original states. Striking religious realignment marked the first 50 years of the nation’s history. On the whole, more evangelical and less established groups (Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians) succeeded dramatically, while older, more structured and/or well-placed ones (especially Congregational and Episcopal Churches) lost position and influence. An increasingly important exception to this pattern was the growing Roman Catholic presence, largely fed through immigration (French, German, and above all, Irish).

By 1860, the more widely distributed denominations had been torn apart along sectional lines for up to two decades, thus anticipating the Civil War. This period of ferment also fostered new religious initiatives ranging from the highly structured Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) through loosely linked Spiritualist cells to idealistic perfectionist communities like Oneida. Whether it helps to call this surge in religious activity and affiliation the Second Great Awakening is really beside the point. With or without legal guarantees, American society proved hospitable to varied religious beliefs and practices beyond anyone’s imagining.

After the Civil War, the growth and diversification of religious groups continued. This did not represent a straight-line development, of course, because the composition of immigrant groups continued to change (southern Europeans becoming more numerous, those from northern Europe, less so). Roman Catholic parishes formed along ethnic lines, with Germans, Italians, and French alike suffering under a predominantly Irish ecclesiastical administration. The much smaller Jewish community found itself divided along lines transposed from ancient European regions, older Spanish-derived Jewry sharing citizenship and space with assimilated German Jews and later with both secular and staunchly traditional Jews from Eastern Europe. Older religious bodies as well as newer religious impulses successfully accommodated their activities and ministries to an increasingly industrial world while also taking

sustained advantage of the free “religious marketplace” afforded them by the United States.

World War I brought sustained immigration to a halt for virtually half a century, and marked a shift in the country’s overall religious dynamics as well. A deep impulse was the evolution of bureaucratic structures even within those denominations most committed to individualism and independence. At least for the immediate future, liberal forces within Protestant groups gained ascendancy. While a shadow was cast over the older bodies by a “religious depression” of reduced revenues and programs in the late 1920s, the most significant developments laid the groundwork for mid-century shifts, including national consolidation of Roman Catholicism (overcoming the longstanding threat of ethnic divisions) and the achievement of American Jews in overcoming anti-Semitic barriers in a range of occupations. Finally, it is clear in retrospect that the massive migration of rural southern blacks to northern urban centers pre-*s*aged a fundamental recasting of America’s most basic dilemma, that of separate and yet intertwined societies, black and white.

Thus by mid-century the American society that had been clearly Protestant in its complexion circa 1800, and predominantly Christian in its complexion circa 1900, would understand itself as religiously tripartite: Protestant-Catholic-Jew. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to divide it four ways, recognizing that the Protestant community was almost wholly divided along lines of color and race that were codified in diverging religious symbols and practices as well as separate religious institutions.

In the last several decades, the religious complexion of American society has further diversified and relentlessly so. The Protestant denominations that formed the religious template of the new nation have lost status and influence to more conservative versions of modern Christianity. The Catholic church has revealed fault lines along ethnic, generational, and class or status lines that belie the universalistic theological claims maintained at papal and even diocesan levels. The Jewish community displays an increasing range of beliefs and practices, and its relationship to the State of Israel induces further tensions. Islam has been a “stealth faith,” drawing membership from reopened channels of immigration, and is poised to assert both its presence and its internal variety. Buddhist and Hindu-derived bodies and allied Asian traditions, not to speak of groups ranging from indigenous Mormons to insistent Jehovah’s Witnesses, contribute to the cosmopolitan complexion of American cities.

We will be misled, however, if we think of America’s religious pluralism only in terms of a multiplicity of fully institutionalized expressions of religion. From the outset, the denominational structures of American society fostered religious innovation, and spiritual movements have been as important in expressing religious influences as any fully developed churches. By definition, movements are never static and always changing. Their objectives range from broad commitments under ideological programs to rather narrowly defined

pay-offs for followers of charismatic saints or exemplary gurus. Like the “Confidence Man” of Melville’s dark story, religion in modern day American society is at once ubiquitous and many-faced.

Two morals may be drawn from this social perspective on the changing shape of religion in the United States. One is that, beginning in the founding period of the nation, the religious complexion of America has changed relentlessly through time. At mid-20th century, there was no way to turn the clock back from Judeo-Christian America to recover Christian America, let alone the earlier Protestant America. With our current awareness of a multi-polar world at the century’s end, comprehension of the religiousness of the nation now routinely requires attention to Islam and extra-Western traditions like Buddhism or those Indian groups loosely identified as Hindu, all of which have accommodated to modern America. As well, amorphous spiritualist impulses join with revitalized nativist movements, among others, to create an extraordinary range of beliefs and practices within the common life. We would require time-travel measured in millennia to return to the ancient Roman Empire to find an example of another society as rife with religious options.

The other moral concerns the astonishing increase in Americans’ religious involvement across more than two centuries. At the time of the nation’s founding, roughly 10 percent of the population were counted as church members. Now, two centuries and more later, some 60 percent of the population identify themselves as such. There are numerous difficulties in attempting to make comparisons across this span of time. Some argue that, as a rule, religious affiliation is less demanding today than it was in earlier eras. It is also the case that religious bodies vary greatly in the categories they use in self-reporting, not to speak of the reliability of such reports. Furthermore, while the current use of polling with respect to religious belief and behavior gives us new data, great caution must be used in linking them to long-term trends. Allowing for these and other relevant variable factors, however, it still appears that religious practice has not declined over our national history, and more likely has increased markedly. Any scenario that posits an increasingly secular, a-religious society seems to be wholly at odds with both historical measurements and contemporary observations.

It remains to consider religion as a factor in the political culture, the primary medium through which it affects both American society and government. The fundamental linkage is clear. Insofar as religion has the potential to mobilize individuals into groups and to act in concert, it is a close analogue to political parties, which are united by shared interests, attachment to common objectives, and hoped-for outcomes. It is also the case that political parties often seek to induce in the faithful a religion-resembling loyalty and commitment; this has often been observed of Communism in Soviet Russia or National Socialism in Nazi Germany—in a word, “others”—but seldom recognized in the American Democratic and Republican parties. In fact, in

America there has long been a nexus between religious identification and political partisanship.”

Prior to the Civil War, the American two-party system displayed pronounced religious characteristics. On the one side, Federalist and subsequently proto-Republican Protestants were strongly associated with New England Calvinism and derivative movements as well as with Episcopal traditions of the South, Middle Atlantic states, and the North. On the other side were arrayed the more evangelical forces, especially the Baptists, Methodists, and the Presbyterians—Protestant groupings without a history of privileged status in America. As the population of Catholics swelled, their predominant association was also with the Democrats.

After the Civil War, this straightforward correlation between religious loyalties and party affiliations shifted significantly. In the increasingly industrial northern states, the Democratic Party became heavily urban and Catholic, while the Republican Party provided a political medium for Protestants of all stripes. Meanwhile, the resulting “Solid South”—at once evangelical Protestant and Democratic—remained a cultural reality until challenged a century later by economic development and through the civil rights struggle of the 1960s. Since then, the South has divided along race and class lines, with Republican ascendancy resting on a white evangelical base. The Catholic phalanx has broken along class and generational lines, among others, eroding support for the Democratic Party while invigorating the ranks of northern Republicans. Thus, since mid-century, the simple model of strong links between particular religious traditions and partisan political loyalty has been modified by increasing correlation with race and class.

If the simplicity of earlier patterns has been clouded, however, it would be an error to assume that religious associations have lost their effect on political behavior. Rather than seeing historic denominations as the basis for the operation of religion within the political culture, we should look to extra-denominational religious groupings. An example of this is the Christian Coalition, although looser movements are perhaps even more important. Some, like the audience of Pat Robertson’s “700 Club,” may essentially be “virtual,” existing only through media. In sum, the expression of religion is changing as dramatically as the society at large, and we should not discount its political roles in the present simply because they do not replicate earlier patterns we have come to understand.

The challenge is not only to comprehend the range and scope of religion in contemporary American society, but also to recognize the dynamic role of religion as it has developed from preceding eras of American history, and to inquire into its means of exerting influence. Here we return to considerations already present as the Framers wrestled with the challenge of constructing a new nation. Religion was associated with many of those divisions that were capable of rendering the new republic inoperable. By defining religious differ-

ences as beyond the reach of the national government to address or resolve, religion itself became a means of registering or even dramatizing differences of opinion in ways that they did not necessarily threaten the common life. In a word, religion has provided American society with an idiom in which it can acknowledge and accept social differentiation.

Given the extraordinary complexity of our society—dedicated as it is to subduing frontiers on land and in space, committed from the outset to opportunistic advantage-taking in commerce, incorporating countless immigrants from around the globe—the potential has been great for social differences to prove insurmountable. Labeling such phenomena in religious terms has served to make them less contentious. In the American context, religious mandates create at least a presumption for toleration, and legal challenges essentially require proof of destructive behaviors, including speech that incites. Likewise, communities of religious discourse can provide cover for radical separatist programs.

Thus, issues as divisive as abortion and euthanasia, because they are mobilized largely through religious idioms, do not tear the nation apart. Nor do educational initiatives as diverse as home schooling, white academies, and Christian colleges, which seem benign when their activities are explained in terms of religious convictions. African-Americans pursuing an ideal society differentiated from the polity readily find their place in the mosaic that is America when they are known as “Black Muslims.” Called “Black Nationalists”—very likely a more accurate description, at least of their original intentions—they would be declared a threat to the state. Thus religious pluralism has provided a conceptual means for Americans to accept even potentially threatening differentiation of the society, reassured that the political compact is unchallenged.

That religiously expressed identities can be highly plural in the United States without seeming to undermine political unity is a noteworthy role-reversal for religion. In the nations of early modern Europe, religious uniformity (coerced) was a means to political unity. In the context of modern America, religious diversity (permitted) is thought to make political unity possible. To be sure, in periods of national crisis—such as when the nation is at war or when a president dies in office—religious discourse and allied symbolic actions may comprise a “civil religion of America.” Such phenomena arise spontaneously even though unqualified loyalty to a single nation may conflict with ancient and deeply codified traditions among Jews and Christians.

Accordingly, we need to pay closer attention to religion in the contemporary political culture. Religious discourse is widely present throughout American society, surrounding and enveloping politics. By using rhetorical strategies that derive power from their religious roots, even discussions about the most mundane events can be charged with great significance. Unquestionably, the ubiquity of religion in America challenges our imaginations. We can view it in national perspective or through local situations. We can construe it in terms of its operation through long-standing institutions or

in terms of its challenge to established ways of doing things. We can find it codified in court rulings, embedded in party platforms and legislation, and expressed in public discourse through references coded as well as direct. But wherever it operates, we overlook religion as a factor in contemporary American politics at our peril.

Religion and Politics in the 1990s: Confrontations and Coalitions

John C. Green

Much of the interest sparked by the relationship between religion and American politics in the 1990s stems from the confrontations generated by the rise of the religious right and the broad-based mobilization of white evangelical Protestants on behalf of the Republican Party. However, other religious groupings were also active in politics, and some in support of liberal causes and the Democratic Party. Even a casual review of American history reveals that religion has often been a source of intense confrontations as well as stable party coalitions. In this sense, the 1990s represent a new variation on an old theme.

Here we will review the political behavior and attitudes of 10 major religious segments of the mass public and describe their role in church/state issues; in moral, social, and economic issues; in partisanship and voting behavior; and in the impeachment of President Clinton. Although we find that some religious groups were the locus of intense confrontations over social issues like abortion, such divisions proved neither as extensive nor as comprehensive as is sometimes portrayed. Instead, religious groups were as often the building blocs of political coalitions, and thus part of the underpinning of stable politics.

Like the rest of society, American religion is enormously diverse and dynamic. The religious landscape is a patchwork quilt of institutions, activities, and values—and one where the “patches” are continually changing shape and forming new patterns. Three basic elements of religion regularly have political consequences: belonging, behaving, and believing (Leege and Kellstedt 1993: chs. 3, 6, 8, 9). Belonging to a religious community constitutes the social context for the religious behaviors and beliefs of most people. Whether they are highly institutionalized hierarchical churches (like Roman Catholicism) or loosely organized challenges to denominations (like the fundamentalist movement among Protestants), religious communities are places where individuals are linked to political issues, parties, and candidates in a particular way. Much of this linkage occurs informally as people with common background and experiences interact with one another. However, such linkages can be deliberately fostered by clergy, lay activists, and outside political organizations.

The actual practice of faith—religious behavior—connects individuals to the religious community to which they belong. Be it involvement in public rit-

ual or personal devotion, religious behavior increases the chance that an individual will partake of the political connections of their co-religionists. As for belief, some concept of the divine is a prime motivation for religious belonging and behavior. Whether beliefs concern religious authority or the correctness of personal behavior and social arrangements, they can be a direct source of positions on issues, and hence attitudes toward party platforms and the promises of candidates.

For purposes of analysis, it is useful to group the religious communities to which individuals belong into religious traditions. An extensive literature has shown that religious traditions have distinctive political outlooks reflecting their special behaviors and beliefs (Miller and Shanks 1996: ch. 9; McCormick 1974; Kellstedt et al. 1996; Kohut et al. 2000). Five major religious traditions are commonly recognized in the United States today: white evangelical, white mainline and black Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. A sixth “tradition,” non-religious people or “Seculars,” is often included as well. Although Seculars operate outside of an explicitly religious context, many belong to nonreligious communities that relate to politics in comparable ways.

If the five major religious traditions have long-standing expectations about the appropriate behaviors and beliefs of their members, they also contain considerable internal diversity. We can thus usefully distinguish between individuals who hold firmly to the historic expectations of their tradition and those who do not; for lack of better terms, the former can be called “traditionalist” and the latter “nontraditionalist.”¹ To be sure, such a distinction oversimplifies most religious traditions. For example, there can be various kinds of traditionalists, reflecting rival views of the expected behaviors and beliefs.² And there can be many kinds of nontraditionalists—some simply indifferent to traditional expectations, others critical of such expectations and actively seeking to reform their tradition.³ Moreover, in recent times scholars have noted that differences within religious traditions have political import (Wuthnow 1988). The fullest expression of this point of view is the “culture wars” thesis, which posits a division between “orthodox” and “progressive” camps within and across religious traditions (Hunter 1991).⁴ Here behavior and belief are seen as the source of distinctive political outlooks, with the orthodox being conserva-

¹ The terms “traditionalist” and “nontraditionalist” are chosen to avoid tradition-specific terms, such as “fundamentalist.” Ideally, traditionalists would be defined by tradition-specific practices and beliefs. Here we are forced to use the same practices and beliefs for all traditions.

² For example, fundamentalist and Pentecostal Protestants could both be the thought of as traditionalists in the evangelical Protestant tradition and they disagree on many things.

³ Such reformers are often called “liberals,” “modernists,” or “progressives.”

⁴ Hunter’s “orthodox” camp is similar to the traditionalists, and the “progressive” camp resemble nontraditionalist reformers. As we have defined it, “traditionalist” is a narrower category than Hunter’s “orthodox.” Traditionalists only make sense in terms of a tradition, while the “orthodox” are identified by practices and beliefs that transcend specific traditions. Put another way, all of the orthodox would be traditionalists, but not all traditionalists would be orthodox. Much depends on exactly how traditionalism and orthodoxy are defined.

tive and the progressives, liberal. Although many of the claims of the culture wars thesis have not been confirmed (see Williams 1997), some differences within religious traditions based on behavior and belief have been found to matter in political attitudes and behavior (Layman 1997; Green et al. 1997).

Religious traditions and traditionalists are often difficult to identify by means of survey data. For one thing, many surveys have inadequate measures of religious affiliation, especially with regard to Protestants and Seculars.⁵ In addition, religious behavior and belief are often measured poorly or not at all. Here we make use of two sets of surveys which include adequate measures of religious belonging, behaving and believing: the National Elections Studies for 1994, 1996, and 1998 (NES 1994, 1996, 1998) and the 1998 National Surveys of Americans on Values (NSAV 1998).⁶

Ten religious categories were constructed for these surveys as follows. After using denominational data to define the five major religious traditions noted above,⁷ we separated out Hispanic Catholics because of their importance in national politics. Next, "traditionalists" were identified among evangelical and mainline Protestants and Catholics by a combination of high levels of religious observance and strong acceptance of the authority of the Bible.⁸ Individuals who did not meet these criteria were labeled "nontraditionalists." (Traditionalists were not identified for the smaller traditions because of the

⁵ Many surveys fail to break down the "Protestant" category, so it is impossible to separate mainliners and evangelicals. This problem can be remedied by the use of a "born again" question to identify evangelicals. Seculars are also poorly measured because most questions imply that the respondent should have a religious preference. This problem can be remedied by counting as Seculars people who report no religious beliefs or behaviors.

⁶ The National Elections Studies were made available by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan. The 1998 National Survey of Americans on Values was conducted in the fall of 1998 by the Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Survey Project and graciously made available by the Washington Post. The margin of error for these surveys is plus or minus four percent for the entire sample. All interpretations of these data are the responsibility of the author.

⁷ For NES, religious traditions were defined by a detailed recoding of denomination data; see Kellstedt et al. (1996:ch. 10) and Kellstedt and Green (1993) for denomination codes. Hispanic Protestants and black Catholics were coded as "other." The 1998 NES was weighted to reflect the over-sampling of Catholics. For the 1998 NSAV, religious traditions were defined by using religious preference data, except for evangelical Protestants, where the "born again" measure was used. The exact coding for both surveys is available from the author upon request.

⁸ Traditionalists were defined in a two-step process. First, church attendance and religious salience were added together. Respondents in the middle of this scale who also reported an inerrant or literalist view of the Bible were counted as traditionalists. The details of this process varied slightly from survey to survey because of variations in items. An effort was made to make the coding as comparable as possible in substantive terms. Exact coding is available from the author. This formulation resembles measures of religious commitment used in the literature (see Kellstedt et al. 1996). The major difference is that the traditionalism distinction includes traditional beliefs, such as a high view of biblical authority, whereas religious commitment often does not include beliefs, or if included, it is the fact of belief rather than the kind of belief that matters. Dividing the major traditions into high and low commitment groups produces very similar results to the distinctions used here (see Kohut et al. 2000).

limited number of cases.⁹⁾ These simple distinctions are quite robust and produce results consistent with studies containing more sophisticated measures of religion (Green et al. 1997).

Table 1 illustrates these 10 religious groups with data from 1996, reporting their relative size and key demographic characteristics. Since these data come from a single survey, they must be viewed with some caution.¹⁰⁾ These findings show that the United States is a nation of religious “minorities” of one sort or another in the 1990s.

TABLE 1: Major Religious Groups among American Adults, 1996

ADULT	POP.	FEMALE	COLLEGE DEGREE	OVER \$50,000	WHITE COLLAR	SOUTH
White Protestant:						
Evangelical:						
Traditional	13%	55%	25%	32%	30%	48%
Nontraditional	9	51	16	34	29	47
Mainline:						
Traditional	5	61	28	34	44	29
Nontraditional	11	58	43	41	50	28
White Catholic:						
Traditional	6	60	32	40	47	23
Nontraditional	15	43	37	41	44	16
Hispanic Catholic	5	57	16	18	24	39
Black Protestant	9	60	10	18	13	59
Jews	2	66	67	39	74	31
Secular	18	43	30	37	37	21
ALL	—*	52%	28%	35%	34%	34%

* Column adds vertically to 93 percent; remaining seven percent include all other religious groups

Source: National Election Study, 1996

White traditionalist evangelical Protestants, the prime constituency of the religious right, accounted for some 13 percent of the adult population, and their nontraditionalist counterparts made up another nine percent, totaling a little more than one-fifth of the population. White mainline Protestants accounted for just under one-fifth of the population, with traditionalists making up about five percent and nontraditionalists 11 percent, respectively. White

⁹⁾ A lack of religious measures prevented us from breaking down the nontraditionalists further, and thus we were unable to identify nontraditionalist reformers within the major traditions. In other surveys, we have been able to identify such reformers within the major traditions, and they tend to have the opposite political views of the traditionalists.

¹⁰⁾ Variation in sampling causes the exact size of these groups to vary somewhat from survey to survey. Such variations did not alter the substantive results. This kind of variation is not unusual in survey data.

Catholics also made up just over one-fifth of the population, and here, too, the traditionalists were smaller (six percent) than the nontraditionalists (15 percent). Nontraditionalist evangelicals and traditionalist mainline Protestants and Catholics were all secondary targets of the religious right.

Hispanic Catholics (five percent), black Protestants (nine percent), and Jews (two percent) were together about as numerous as mainline Protestants, and Seculars were slightly larger, at just under one-fifth of the total; all other faiths accounted for the remaining seven percent. The religious right has made overtures to black Protestants, but with little success. Opponents of the religious right have been active among nontraditionalists of all sorts, ethnic minorities, Jews, and Seculars.

The next several columns in Table 1 describe the demographic characteristics of these religious groups. Note that the traditionalist groups tended to be more female whereas nontraditionalists and Seculars tended to be more male. Jews were the best educated groups, followed by nontraditionalist mainline Protestants and Catholics; all these groups were among the most affluent and most likely to hold white-collar jobs. Seculars had slightly higher social status than the sample as a whole, evangelicals had modestly lower status, and Hispanic Catholics and black Protestants, the lowest social status. Evangelical and black Protestants showed a distinct tendency to live in the South.

Before we turn to the political behavior and attitudes of these religious groups in the 1990s, one caveat is in order. Religion is only one of many factors associated with politics, and a full explanation of political attitudes and behaviors would include other demographic factors such as gender, income, and education. Yet it is important to note that the results reported here persist when other demographic factors are controlled. Thus, while religion is not the only—or even the most—important factor in politics, it often has an independent and significant impact.

A good place to begin our review is with some basic attitudes about the role of religion in public affairs. The religious right, like the civil rights and anti-war movements before it, provoked bitter confrontations over the appropriateness of “political” religion. Table 2 presents some evidence that the debate persisted in the 1990s. When given a choice between agreeing with two statements, “organized religious groups of all kinds should stay out of politics” or “it is important for organized religious groups to stand up for their beliefs in politics,” a slim 52 percent majority opted for the latter in 1998. This pattern is a reversal of opinion in the 1960s, when a slim majority opposed the political involvement of religious groups (Kohut et al. 2000; Pew Research Center 1996). Overall, 38 percent of Americans claimed they would “rather see religious and spiritual values have greater influence in politics and public life,” and another 38 percent felt such influence should remain about the same. Only 22 percent wanted religious and spiritual values to have less influence (data not shown) (NSAV 1998).

TABLE 2: Religious Groups and Church/State Issues

	CHURCHES SHOULD: STAY OUT OF POLITICS	CHURCHES SHOULD: STAND UP FOR VALUES	GOVERNMENT SHOULD: SEPARATE CHURCH/STATE	GOVERNMENT SHOULD: PROTECT RELIGIOUS HERITAGE
White Protestant:				
Evangelical:				
Traditional	16%	81%	25%	70%
Nontraditional	39	57	39	55
Mainline:				
Traditional	43	53	48	48
Nontraditional	59	39	56	40
White Catholic:				
Traditional	36	62	40	59
Nontraditional	58	40	56	40
Hispanic Catholic	51	49	43	54
Black Protestant	28	69	36	57
Jews	73	24	84	11
Secular	63	34	66	30
ALL	45%	52%	47%	48%

Source: 1998 National Survey of Americans on Values

Evangelical Protestants were the most supportive of “political” religion, with the newly politicized traditionalists leading the way. Interestingly, black Protestants were the second most supportive group, reflecting the political tradition of the black churches dating from the civil rights movement. In the three largest Christian traditions, the traditionalists were markedly more supportive of religion-based politics than their nontraditionalist counterparts. Indeed, nontraditionalist mainliners and Catholics approached the level of opposition to political religion of Seculars and Jews.

One reason for the controversy surrounding religion and politics is the fear that the “wall of separation” between church and state will be breached. Table 2 also presents some evidence on this point. In 1998, the public was evenly divided between the statements “there should be a high degree of separation between church and state” and “the government should take special steps to protect America’s religious heritage.” Traditionalist evangelicals were the most supportive of government protection of religion, and Jews were the most in favor of strict church/state separation. Traditionalist and Hispanic Catholics and black Protestants on balance favored government protection, while mainline traditionalists were evenly divided. Nontraditionalists of all sorts tended to be more “separationist” than their traditionalist counterparts, and Seculars were strongly so.

Thus, religion itself was a political issue in the 1990s, and disagreements over the public role of religion were filtered through a complex web of religious affiliations, practices, and beliefs. These divisions were at the root of confrontations over the relationship between the government and organized

religion. Two good examples were vouchers for religious schools and prayer in the public schools, opinions about which are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Religious Groups, School Vouchers, and School Prayer

	TYPE OF PRAYER:		PRO SCHOOL	CHILDREN ALLOWED	SPECIFIC
	PRO	IF HURTS	PRAYER	TO PRAY	CHRISTIAN PRAYER
	VOUCHERS	SCHOOLS			
White Protestant:					
Evangelical:					
Traditional	54%	31%	89%	60%	13%
Nontraditional	58	32	84	60	11
Mainline:					
Traditional	40	21	73	64	6
Nontraditional	32	18	67	64	5
White Catholic:					
Traditional	68	47	85	50	12
Nontraditional	55	32	64	58	4
Hispanic Catholics	65	24	69	46	18
Black Protestants	52	23	84	51	23
Jews	22	11	22	33	0
Secular	41	20	46	52	3
ALL	49%	27%	71%	56%	9%

Source: 1998 National Survey of Americans on Values

In 1998, Americans were evenly divided on school vouchers, with 49 percent favoring them and 49 percent opposed. Catholics were the most supportive, especially traditionalists and Hispanics. Evangelical and black Protestants were the next most supportive. Both kinds of mainline Protestants were opposed, as were Jews and Seculars. Note that support dropped in all groups if it is stipulated that vouchers “would hurt the public schools.”

A different pattern obtained on school prayer, which was quite popular with the public. Indeed, only Jews and Seculars opposed “allowing public schools to start each day with a prayer.” In each tradition, the traditionalists were more in favor than the nontraditionalists, a pattern we will see repeatedly on other issues. However, the last two columns suggest this strong support for school prayer hid more complex views. In a separate survey, respondents were asked what kind of school prayer they favored (NES 1996). A majority favored “allowing public schools to schedule time when children can pray silently if they want to,” but less than one-tenth favored a specific Christian prayer.¹¹ Interestingly, it was black Protestants rather than evangelical traditionalists who were most likely to want a specific Christian prayer in public school. Thus, much of the strong public support for school prayer may involve a guarantee of free exercise of faith rather than a desire to impose faith

¹¹ Other options not shown include allowing no prayer (12 percent) and scheduling time for non-sectarian prayer (21 percent).

on others. Such a position combines support for traditional religious standards with a recognition of individual rights.

Religious groups, especially traditionalists, are widely perceived to be a source of confrontations over morality and a host of social issues. While there is some truth to this proposition, the reality was complex in the 1990s. Support for “traditional” morality was widespread, but so was support for tolerance and individual rights.

Table 4 takes a direct look at religious groups and basic attitudes on morality. The first column reports the percentage of each religious group that believed the country was on the “wrong track” with regard to “values and morals.” Overall, there was widespread agreement with this statement. Evangelical Protestants had the most pessimistic view of the nation’s moral health, with nine out of 10 traditionalists claiming the nation was on the “wrong track” morally. Mainline Protestants and Catholics were modestly less concerned, although here too the traditionalists were more likely to give the “wrong track” response. However, even two-thirds of Jews shared this perspective. So there was something of a consensus that the nation had lost its “moral compass.”

TABLE 4: Religious Groups and Attitudes toward Morality

	US ON “WRONG TRACK ON MORALS**	AGREE (NEWER LIFESTYLES BREAK DOWN SOCIETY**)	DISAGREE (ADJUST MORALS MORALS TO CHANGING TIMES**)	AGREE (TOLERATE DIFFERENT MORAL STANDARDS*)
White Protestant:				
Evangelical:				
Traditional	89%	91%	66%	55%
Nontraditional	84	61	54	68
Mainline:				
Traditional	76	73	79	71
Nontraditional	67	65	44	75
White Catholic:				
Traditional	81	76	55	64
Nontraditional	71	74	40	76
Hispanic Catholic	76	54	37	71
Black Protestant	74	68	39	71
Jews	66	45	25	85
Secular	71	49	34	78
ALL	71%	70%	51%	70%

Sources: * 1998 National Survey of Americans on Values

** National Elections Study 1996

The next three items tap different perspectives on morality. Agreement with the first statement—“the newer lifestyles are contributing to the break-

down of our society”—is an affirmation of the need for social order over innovation. Disagreement with the second statement—“the world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes”—is a rejection of moral relativism. And agreement with the final statement—“we should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards even if we think they are wrong”—is a straightforward statement of toleration. Support for social order and rejection of relativism are likely to be sources of confrontation in politics, while tolerance should reduce political tensions.

Traditionalist evangelicals were by far the most likely to support social order over innovation, and they were also the most likely to oppose adjustments in morality. Traditionalist mainline Protestants and Catholics also shared these views, but to a lesser extent. In all three traditions, nontraditionalists were markedly less likely to agree with these positions. Hispanic Catholics and black Protestants also supported social order over new lifestyles, but did not oppose adjustments in morality nearly as much. Jews and Seculars were the least supportive in both cases.

What about tolerance of the moral standards of others? All the religious groups supported toleration. Traditionalist evangelicals were the least tolerant, but more than one-half reported a tolerant position. Nontraditionalists were more tolerant than their traditionalist counterparts; ethnic minorities and Seculars were even more tolerant; and Jews, the most so. Interestingly, Americans of all faiths appeared to recognize a high degree of tolerance among themselves, though not necessarily in a favorable light: Sixty-nine percent agreed that Americans “are too tolerant and accepting of behaviors that in the past were considered immoral or wrong” (data not shown, NSAV 1998).

Taken together, these data point to a privatization of morality (Bellah et al. 1985). Although most religious groups were concerned about moral standards, they were generally reluctant to impose them on other people. This pattern even held to a lesser extent for religious traditionalists.

These attitudes on morality were reflected in positions on sexual behavior and related public policies that have generated intense political confrontations in recent times. Table 5 reviews attitudes on heterosexual behavior and women’s rights. The first column reports the percentage of the religious groups who believed premarital sex was “unacceptable and should not be tolerated.” Here there were stark differences among the religious groups. Evangelicals were more opposed to premarital sex than mainline Protestants and Catholics, who in turn were more opposed than Seculars and Jews. Once again, nontraditionalists were less opposed than their traditionalist counterparts. As for extramarital sex, Table 5 also shows that the public as a whole was even more likely to say that it was “unacceptable and should not be tolerated,” but the pattern among religious groups was essentially the same.

TABLE 5: Religious Groups, Sexual Issues, and Women's Rights

	UNACCEPTABLE: PREMARITAL SEX*	EXTRAMARITAL SEX*	ABORTION: LIMIT	BAN*	WOMEN EQUAL WITH MEN*
White Protestant:					
Evangelical:					
Traditional	74%	87%	73%	25%	63%
Nontraditional	54	81	42	11	79
Mainline:					
Traditional	54	75	42	4	68
Nontraditional	28	65	19	2	82
White Catholic:					
Traditional	50	77	53	20	71
Nontraditional	26	66	39	9	88
Hispanic Catholic	41	69	51	12	85
Black Protestant	50	69	41	16	79
Jews	14	47	10	0	93
Secular	29	62	23	6	85
ALL	43%	72%	41%	12%	78%

Source: * 1998 National Survey of Americans on Values

** National Elections Study 1996

The third and fourth columns of Table 5 report positions on abortion—first, the percentage who would restrict abortion either by limiting it to cases of rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life or banning it altogether; and then the percentage who would ban all abortions. Traditionalist evangelicals were the strongest proponents of restricting abortion, with traditionalist and Hispanic Catholics, a distant second. Mainline Protestants and nontraditionalists of all sorts were markedly less supportive of restrictions, and Seculars and Jews, by far the least. But note that far fewer people would ban abortions entirely. Not even traditionalist evangelicals (25 percent) and Catholics (20 percent) mustered majority support for such a ban.

Opposition to abortion is often interpreted as general opposition to women's rights, but the final column in Table 5 suggests that this assumption may not be warranted. Large majorities of all religious groups agreed that "women and men should have an equal role" in society, although evangelicals and traditionalists were somewhat less supportive. Thus, even religious groups that insist that women "graciously submit" to their husbands strongly supported gender equality.¹²

Table 6 offers some parallel findings on homosexuality, also a source of bitter confrontations. The first column reports the percentage of religious groups

¹² Additional items in NVAD suggest that acceptance of gender equality is very widespread. For example, 80 percent of the sample disagreed with the notion that the husband should have the "final say on all important financial and family decisions."

that believe that gay sex is “unacceptable and should not be tolerated.” With one exception, the pattern was very similar to the data on premarital sex in Table 5: Evangelicals and all traditionalists were most opposed to homosexuality; Seculars, Jews, and all nontraditionalists were less so. The exception was traditionalist mainline Protestants, who closely resembled their nontraditional counterparts. This anomaly extended to gay marriages (the next column) and may reflect the debate over gay rights taking place in mainline Protestant churches. As with extramarital sex, all religious groups were more likely to say gay marriage was “unacceptable and should not be tolerated” than gay sex, and very similar patterns obtained.

TABLE 6: Religious Groups, Homosexuality, and Gay Rights

	UNACCEPTABLE: GAY SEX	GAY MARRIAGE	HOMOSEXUALITY ILLEGAL: PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PROTECT GAYS FROM JOB DISCRIMINATION
White Protestant:					
Evangelical:					
Traditional	74%	84%	64%	26%	74%
Nontraditional	64	74	36	16	82
Mainline:					
Traditional	45	56	36	12	90
Nontraditional	48	56	25	12	88
White Catholic:					
Traditional	58	65	31	12	91
Nontraditional	38	45	20	6	93
Hispanic Catholics	44	48	23	10	95
Black Protestants	63	74	49	31	85
Jews	22	24	16	11	90
Secular	42	44	20	8	94
ALL	53%	61%	34%	14%	87%

Source: 1998 National Survey of Americans on Values

The third and fourth columns of Table 6 report on the legality of homosexuality—first, whether homosexual relations should be against the law in general, and then whether they should be illegal “even if this means that consenting adults who engage in these activities in their own homes could be prosecuted for a crime.” (For ease of presentation, we label these positions “public” and “private.”) The figures for these positions are roughly analogous to restricting and banning abortions, and the pattern of opinion here is reminiscent of Table 5. Only traditionalist evangelicals showed a majority for “public” illegality of homosexual relations; black Protestants were the strongest supporters of “private” illegality. The final column in Table 6 turns to protecting gays from job discrimination. These figures resemble the responses on women’s rights: All religious groups supported protecting gays from job dis-

crimination, although traditionalist evangelicals were somewhat less supportive. These figures reveal a degree of cognitive dissonance, especially among the traditionalists groups, which believe in making homosexuality illegal and protecting the employment rights of homosexuals. Such apparent inconsistency reflects the tension between two sets of deeply held values: traditional morality and individual economic rights.

In all of the major religious traditions, questions of morality extend beyond sexual behavior to economic issues. Indeed, many of the same sacred texts that strictly regulate sexual behavior also demand justice for the poor. Table 7 looks at the opinions of religious groups on four economic issues. The first column reports disagreement with the proposition that the government should "reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and people with low incomes." Two-thirds of Americans were opposed to such redistribution of income, extending from evangelical traditionalists to Seculars, with black Protestants and Hispanic Catholics being an exception. There were also some modest differences between traditionalist and nontraditionalist Protestants, especially among mainliners.

	GOVERNMENT SHOULD: EQUALIZE INCOME NO*	REDUCE POVERTY YES*	FEWER PUBLIC SERVICES, LOWER TAXES**	IMPROVE STANDARD OF LIVING*
White Protestant:				
Evangelical:				
Traditional	73%	64%	55%	45%
Nontraditional	69	71	34	49
Mainline:				
Traditional	81	67	54	49
Nontraditional	66	71	42	52
White Catholic:				
Traditional	67	72	42	54
Nontraditional	69	74	37	54
Hispanic Catholic	59	78	20	65
Black Protestant	49	75	16	70
Jews	71	63	14	58
Secular	70	71	40	41
ALL	67%	71%	39%	51%

Source: * 1998 National Survey of Americans on Values

** National Elections Study 1996

The division between traditionalists and nontraditionalists also appears in the second column, which reports opinion on the proposition that the federal government should reduce poverty. Aiding the poor was a much more popular idea than equalizing income, and was especially popular among Hispanic

Catholics and black Protestants. Nontraditionalists were modestly more supportive of eliminating poverty than their traditionalist counterparts, but a majority of every group was in agreement. There were also modest differences on the proposition that the government should “do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all Americans,” a staple of national political debate since the New Deal. However, more significant differences appeared with regard to the scope and size of the federal government. Traditionalist Protestants were the strongest proponents of fewer public services and lower taxes, while their nontraditional counterparts were less so. Catholics showed a muted version of this division. The remaining religious groups tend to favor more public services and higher taxes.

In sum, in line with their moral views, traditionalist evangelicals represented the core of support for conservative social policies on abortion and homosexuality. Although other traditionalists shared traditional moral perspectives, they were not as committed to conservative social policies. Jews, Seculars, and nontraditionalists represented the core of support for liberal social policies. While controversy over abortion and gay rights was often quite intense, battles have been fought within relatively narrow confines, hemmed in by high levels of tolerance. By contrast, economic questions result in only modest differences of opinion among the religious groups.

TABLE 8: Religion, Partisanship, and Ideology ***

	PARTISANSHIP*		IDEOLOGY**	
	REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRAT	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL
White Protestant:				
Evangelical:				
Traditional	60%	30%	70%	10%
Nontraditional	41	49	45	25
Mainline:				
Traditional	57	35	68	16
Nontraditional	53	38	51	25
White Catholic:				
Traditional	44	43	58	19
Nontraditional	40	50	45	31
Hispanic Catholic	19	70	34	38
Black Protestant	8	84	36	35
Jews	15	79	20	69
Secular	34	50	37	41
ALL	40%	49%	48%	28%

* Independents not reported

** Moderates not reported

*** Entries are means for 1994, 1996, and 1998

Source: National Elections Study, 1994, 1996, and 1998

Table 8 looks at the partisan and ideological self-identifications that underlie stable political coalitions and structure routine political competition. These figures are the averages for 1994, 1996, and 1998,¹³ and for purposes of presentation, pure independents and moderates are excluded from the table (but can be calculated by subtracting the table entries from 100 percent).

Traditionalist evangelicals were the most Republican group in the 1990s, but their nontraditionalist counterparts were on balance Democratic. A similar internal division applied to mainline Protestants, although here the nontraditionalists were on balance Republican. Catholic traditionalists were evenly divided, while their nontraditionalist counterparts were in the Democratic camp. In all three cases, the nontraditionalist groups showed the historic party preferences of their religious traditions dating from the New Deal era, while the traditionalists show some recent departures (Kellstedt et al 1996). Black Protestants were the most Democratic group, followed closely by Jews, Hispanic Catholics, and then Seculars.

Although the country leaned Democratic in the 1990s, it also leaned in a conservative direction. Traditionalist evangelicals were the most conservative of the religious groups, followed by mainline Protestant and Catholic traditionalists; their nontraditionalist counterparts were also on balance conservative, but to a lesser extent. Black Protestants, Hispanic Catholics, and Seculars were almost evenly divided on self-identified ideology, and Jews were the only solidly liberal religious group.

TABLE 9: Religious Groups and Voting Behavior, 1994-1998

TWO-PARTY VOTE:	PRESIDENT 1996		HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES					
	REP	DEM	1998		1996		1994	
	REP	DEM	REP	DEM	REP	DEM	REP	DEM
White Protestant:								
Evangelical:								
Traditional	74%	26%	79%	21%	75%	25%	71%	29%
Nontraditional	45	55	61	39	49	51	65	35
Mainline:								
Traditional	61	39	63	37	68	32	66	34
Nontraditional	47	53	59	41	57	43	61	39
White Catholic:								
Traditional	62	38	68	32	66	34	60	40
Nontraditional	39	61	43	57	54	46	56	44
Hispanic Catholic	14	86	16	84	17	83	22	78
Black Protestant	3	97	28	72	19	81	19	81
Jews	8	92	23	77	26	74	30	70
Secular	36	64	42	58	43	57	41	59
ALL	43%	57%	53%	47%	53%	47%	54%	46%

Source: National Election Studies 1998, 1996, and 1994

¹³ The partisan and ideology figures were averaged because there were significant variations between the surveys, reflecting the unusual circumstances of the 1994, 1996, and 1998 elections. The averages thus give a better picture of the underlying political identifications of religious groups during the 1990s.

These political identifications were often associated with voting behavior. Table 9 reports the two-party vote in the 1996 presidential election and the two-party congressional vote in 1998, 1996, and 1994. These patterns reveal the role of religion in stable party coalitions.

In the 1996 presidential balloting, the Republicans received the most support from traditionalists, especially evangelicals, but also from traditionalist mainline Protestants and Catholics, all of whom gave Senator Dole more than three-fifths of their votes. In contrast, the Democrats did best among black Protestants, followed by Hispanic Catholics, Jews, and Seculars, all of whom gave more than three-fifths of their votes to President Clinton. Clinton also did well among nontraditionalist Catholics, and won slimmer majorities of nontraditionalist evangelical and mainline Protestants.

These patterns may appear to contradict the conventional wisdom that the 1996 election was the result of a good economy attributed to President Clinton. In fact, these data were consistent with the importance of economic conditions. The strong economy helped Clinton with religious groups that might otherwise have voted Republican in larger numbers, and enhanced his performance among groups already disposed to support him. Only white Christian traditionalists substantially resisted the powerful pull of good economic conditions.

This point can be seen more clearly if one compares the presidential ballots to the vote for House of Representatives in 1996, where the congressional Republicans were also winners and beneficiaries of good times. Note that the House GOP vote was greater than the Republican presidential vote in every religious group, but especially among nontraditional mainline Protestants and Catholics. Of course, the congressional election was actually hundreds of separate contests in which Republican candidates could make individualized appeals, an option less available to a presidential campaign. The power of incumbency favored Republicans. Nevertheless, these figures suggest how a Republican presidential candidate might win the 2000 election—and how the Democrats might retake control of the Congress.

The same patterns appeared in the 1994 and 1998 congressional contests, both of which were historic elections. In 1994, the Republicans won control of the House of Representatives for the first time since the 1950s, and in 1998, the Democrats gained seats—the first time since 1934 that the party controlling the White House had done so. Traditionalist evangelicals were the strongest Republican group in both elections, actually increasing their GOP margin in 1998, a pattern shared with Catholic traditionalists. One very big surprise in these data was the vote of black Protestants in

1998: The 28 percent Republican vote represents a major jump over 1996.¹⁴ Most of the other religious groups showed modest declines or no change over 1994.

These findings also may appear to contradict conventional wisdom about the 1998 election, which stresses Republican disappointment and Democratic elation. It must be remembered, however, that the congressional Republicans actually won the 1998 election, and though painful, their losses were small. Indeed, the GOP net gain in 1994 was about 10 times larger than their net loss in 1998 (a 52-seat gain versus a five-seat loss). In fact, much of the common understanding of the 1998 election derives from a small number of unusual contests where the Democrats dramatically upset expectations. In those cases, the Republicans had every reason to be unhappy. On the one hand, they apparently had trouble mobilizing their base voters, including evangelical traditionalists, and lost many nontraditionalists to the Democrats. In contrast, the Democrats apparently mobilized their base vote in these races, especially black Protestants, and may have garnered a large share of the white Protestant vote (see Green et al. 1998; Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2000).

However, these unusual instances did not appear in the national survey data employed here, which showed that the patterns of 1994 persisted in 1998. In both years, the congressional Republicans won with a fragile coalition of religious traditionalists and nontraditionalists, with a leavening of Seculars and ethnic minorities. This coalition was the counterpart to President Clinton's combination of ethnic minorities, Seculars, and nontraditionalists, bolstered by a contingent of white Christian traditionalists.

Table 10 reveals the dimensions of these coalitions by reporting the religious groups' relative contribution to each party's vote.¹⁵ Throughout the 1990s, traditionalist evangelicals were the single largest religious element in the GOP coalition, ranging between one-fifth and one-quarter of Republican total. If nontraditionalist evangelicals were added in, evangelical Protestants approached one-third of the GOP vote during this period. In contrast, main-line Protestants, once a Republican bastion, accounted for between one-fifth and one-quarter of the GOP vote over the period, and Catholics, once the Democratic bastion, made a similar contribution. In both cases, nontraditionalists were more numerous in the Republican column, despite their weaker level of support. All the remaining groups together accounted for the remaining one-fifth of the GOP vote.

¹⁴ This usual finding on the vote of black Protestants in 1998 may be the result of sampling error. In small sub-samples, just a few cases can make a substantial difference. There is some strong evidence that intense mobilization of the black vote in key states was crucial to Democratic victories in 1998 (Kohut et al. 2000).

¹⁵ The data in Table 10 essentially take turnout of the various groups into account. However, turnout is notoriously difficult to assess with accuracy with survey data, which universally overstate voter participation. For example, NES 1998 reports a 52 percent turnout, a figure much higher than the official statistics of 36 percent.

TABLE 10: Religious Groups and Party Coalitions, 1994-1998

TWO-PARTY VOTE:	PRESIDENT 1996		HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES					
	REP	DEM	REP	DEM	REP	DEM	REP	DEM
White Protestant:								
Evangelical:								
Traditional	25%	7%	23%	7%	21%	8%	26%	12%
Nontraditional	7	7	9	6	7	8	8	5
Mainline:								
Traditional	9	4	14	9	9	5	8	5
Nontraditional	15	13	13	10	15	12	16	12
White Catholic:								
Traditional	10	5	9	5	9	5	8	6
Nontraditional	14	17	11	16	16	15	15	14
Hispanic Catholic	1	6	1	9	1	7	2	7
Black Protestant	1	14	5	13	2	15	3	14
Jews	1	4	1	4	1	4	2	4
Secular	11	16	11	17	12	17	9	14
Others	6	7	3	4	7	4	3	7
	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Traditionalists	44%	16%	46%	21%	39%	18%	42%	23%
Nontraditionalists	36	37	33	32	38	35	39	31
Minorities/Jews	9	31	10	30	11	30	10	32
Seculars	11	16	11	17	12	17	9	14
	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: National Election Studies 1998, 1996, and 1994

The Democrats showed essentially the opposite pattern. The two largest voting blocs were Seculars and nontraditional Catholics, each at about one-sixth of the Democratic total. As a whole, Catholics and mainline Protestants provided the Democrats with roughly one-quarter of their support over the period. Black Protestants accounted for about one-seventh of the Democratic total, and all ethnic and religious minorities provided between one-quarter and one-third of the vote. Interestingly, white evangelicals of all sorts provided about as many Democratic votes as black Protestants.

The import of these religious distinctions can be seen more clearly at the bottom of Table 10. For example, in 1998 religious traditionalists of all kinds accounted for almost one-half of Republican vote, and nontraditionalists, about one-third. However, if Seculars were added to the nontraditionalists, the two groups match the traditionalists in number. These data reveal why Republican leaders of all sorts pay court to the Religious Right, but also why religiously based disputes can be so problematic for the Grand Old Party.

Similar divisions occurred among Democrats. Again in 1998, religious traditionalists made up about one-fifth of the Democratic vote—a distinct minority but slightly more than the Seculars. Nontraditionalists, ethnic minorities, and Jews were roughly comparable at under one-third of the vote. However, if Seculars were added to nontraditionalists, the total almost equaled one-half of the Democratic coalition. These figures help explain the receptivity of Democratic party leaders to lifestyle innovations, but also the problem ethnic and racial tensions can pose for the “party of the people.”

To many commentators, the impeachment of President Clinton was the embodiment of religiously based confrontation in the 1990s. After all, Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky and his subsequent mendacity seemed to parallel public disagreements over morality. Table 11 reviews four items related to the impeachment from the 1998 National Election Study, collected shortly after the 1998 election. Overall, the items show the same general results as dozens of polls taken in the fall of 1998: The public opposed impeachment, had a low opinion of the President’s character, and strongly approved of the President’s job performance. How did these opinions break-down by religious groups?

	CLINTON SHOULD BE IMPEACHED	SCANDAL A PUBLIC MATTER	CLINTON NOT “MORAL”	APPROVE OF CLINTON’S JOB AS PRESIDENT
White Protestant:				
Evangelical:				
Traditional	55%	54%	72%	54%
Nontraditional	36	34	57	66
Mainline:				
Traditional	35	37	65	74
Nontraditional	19	26	52	71
White Catholic:				
Traditional	34	38	62	77
Nontraditional	31	31	52	73
Hispanic Catholic	23	19	26	92
Black Protestant	6	12	18	97
Jews	20	35	46	97
Secular	22	27	42	77
ALL	30%	32%	50%	74%

Source: National Election Study, 1998

First, nearly all of the religious groups opposed impeachment. Only among evangelical traditionalists was there a slim majority in favor of impeaching the president. Evangelical nontraditionalists were markedly less in favor, matching the views mainline traditionalists and both groups of Catholics. Mainline non-

traditionalists were much less supportive, resembling Jews, Seculars, and Hispanic Catholics. Virtually no black Protestants supported impeachment. Leaders of the Religious Right may have wanted Clinton removed from office, but they had only modest support from their prime constituency of evangelical Protestants.

However, as the second column of Table 11 indicates, the President did pay a personal price for the scandal. One-half of the public believed the term “moral” did “not at all well” describe Clinton, and virtually no one reported that the term fit him “well.” There were strong religious differences here: Evangelicals were the most likely to see the president as immoral, with mainline Protestants and Catholics close behind. In every case, traditionalists were more critical than non-traditionalists. The remaining groups were not pleased with the president’s character,¹⁶ but did not reject him to the extent as white Christians.

Throughout the Lewinsky scandal, observers puzzled over the fact that negative views of the President’s character did not translate into demands for his ouster. The remaining items in Table 11 address some reasons why this might have been the case. The third column reports that only about one-third of the country thought the scandal was a “public” matter, with the views of religious groups closely tracking support for impeachment. Traditionalist evangelicals were the most likely to see the scandal as a public matter, but only by a slim majority. Other white Christians were much less likely to feel that way, although mainline and Catholic traditionalists differed from their nontraditionalist counterparts.

The final column in Table 11 presents the more common explanation for the public’s anti-impeachment stance: the president’s job approval. Clinton’s high ratings extended to all the religious groups, including traditionalist evangelicals. Even stronger patterns held for the president’s handling of the economy (data not shown). Thus, all religious groups substantially approved of Clinton’s public job performance, and although most disapproved of his personal conduct, they saw it as a private matter and thus insufficient to warrant impeachment, let alone removal from office. These patterns are similar to the patterns on morality we observed in Table 4.

Our review of religion and politics in the 1990s suggests, first, that religion was often an important factor in the political attitudes and behavior of the American public. In this regard, distinctions among religious traditions, and between traditionalists and nontraditionalists within the major traditions, were useful ways of understanding the complex relationship between religion and politics. Religious traditions frequently differed on a wide range of political matters, and within the largest traditions, traditionalists and nontraditionalists often differed.

¹⁶ This item was a four-point scale in which respondents were asked how well the term “moral” fit Clinton. The figures reported in Table 11 are for the fourth point on the scale, “not well at all.” Very few people chose “extremely well”; Clinton’s supporters tended to pick “not too well.”

Second, religious groups were frequently the locus of intense confrontations. On church/state relations, moral and social issues, evangelical traditionalists were strong supporters of conservative positions on social issues. Similarly, nontraditionalists, Jews, and Seculars were frequently strong advocates of liberal positions on these same issues. However, these conflicts were neither as extensive nor as comprehensive as sometimes portrayed. For while they arose from strongly divergent views of morality, they were often softened by the strong attachment of Americans to tolerance and recognition of individual rights.

Finally, religious groups were important elements of the stable political coalitions that undergird routine politics. In the 1990s, each of the major parties had strong religious constituencies. The Republican Party derived the most support from traditionalists, especially among evangelicals, while the Democrats drew the most support from ethnic minorities, Jews, and Seculars. Each party was able to build winning electoral coalitions by reaching beyond its core constituencies. Relatively small religious groups can exercise considerable influence as key parts of such coalitions—but their influence is limited by the importance of other coalition partners.

These conclusions beg a question: What role will religion play in the 2000 election and the early years of the 21st century? Although any forecast is hazardous at best, it would appear that the intense confrontations of the 1990s, especially on social issues, may diminish somewhat in the near future, although these conflicts are unlikely to entirely disappear. The fervor and activity of the religious right may have been checked by a combination of failures (such as the drive to impeach Clinton) and successes (such as their influence in the GOP). The religious right also faces increased opposition from other kinds of religious people and the secular population. However, the lessening of such confrontations may presage the further absorption of religious groups into the stable party coalitions, with religion becoming a staple of future campaign and party platforms. Indeed, the widespread discussion of religion by most major party candidates in the 2000 presidential primary campaign may be an indication of this trend. In any event, the impact of religion on American politics bears careful watching in 2000 and thereafter.

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The Press v. the Pulpit: State and Local Coverage of the Religious Factor in Politics

Mark J. Rozell

In 1994, when Iran-contra figure Oliver North ran for the U.S. Senate as the Republican nominee from Virginia, he frequently told audiences that every morning he began his day with two readings, the Bible and the *Washington Post* in order to get “both sides.” This line brought loud cheers of approval from audiences of socially conservative supporters, and journalists frequently cited North’s comment and the favorable audience response as indicative of the large gap between the worlds of socially conservative political activists and the mainstream media.

Indeed, there is a long-standing assumption in American politics that Christian Right activists and the journalists who cover and analyze them have nothing in common. Stereotypes abound among both groups about one another. Christian conservative leaders and fundraising appeals for Christian conservative causes have never ceased quoting a statement in a 1993 *Postnews* story that members of the Christian right are “largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command.” Although this is a famously egregious example of journalistic stereotyping, Christian Right leaders have not been entirely mistaken in seizing upon the phrase as a true, if exaggerated statement of what many in the journalistic community believe. Christian conservatives see journalists, along with academics, as among the “elite” in our society that is hostile to religion and to religious persons. Indeed, journalists tell of being inundated with negative reactions to news stories by religious conservative news consumers, oftentimes accusing the media of anti-Christian bigotry.

As we will see, however, common perceptions do not mirror reality. While there are important differences between members of the Christian Right and the journalists who cover them, the two groups have much more in common than is widely believed. At the core of the perception that journalists don’t properly understand the politically active religious community is the belief that they are too separated from the religious community even to know where to look for reliable sources of information.¹⁷ That too is a misconception.

¹⁷ This criticism cuts in both directions. In my studies of Christian Right politics and own dealings with political reporters, I’ve noticed: (1) social conservative leaders and activists complain that reporters stereotype and don’t know where to look to get an accurate story about the movement; and (2) journalists complain that social conservatives erect large walls of separation from the media because of their suspicions about journalistic biases, thereby making it almost impossible to get reliable information.

What follows is derived from a series of surveys of state and local political reporters and editors in four states and from Republican Party convention delegates in those same states. The states—Virginia, Florida, Texas, and Washington—were selected primarily for considerations of levels of Christian Right activism in the GOP and, secondarily, for geographic distribution.¹⁸ The surveys of the GOP delegates were conducted in the mid-1990s; the journalist surveys, in early 1999. The two sets of surveys contain identical and nearly identical questions on demographic characteristics, policy, and ideological measures. The journalist surveys also include a series of questions on coverage patterns designed to show how journalists handle the religious factor in politics.

The delegate surveys comprise random samples of delegates to four Republican state conventions in the mid-1990s: Virginia (1994; 447 cases; 48 percent return rate); Washington (1995; 506 cases; 60 percent return rate); Texas (1995; 507 cases; 60 percent return rate); Florida (1996; 404 cases; 45 percent return rate). In order to identify delegates who belonged to the Christian Right, they included a variety of measures of support for religiously conservative organizations and leaders (Rozell, Green, Wilcox, 1998).

The journalist surveys comprise random samples from the *Gebbie All in One Directory* (1999) of state and local political reporters and editors as well as religion reporters and editors for daily newspapers in the same four states. Altogether, there were 91 journalists surveyed and an overall response rate of 31 percent.¹⁹ The substantially lower number of cases merely reflects the fact that there are many more party convention delegates in each state than state/local political and religion journalists. Nonetheless, because of the relatively small number of journalists responding, the findings reflect the combined responses for all of the states.

In terms of demographic characteristics, the journalists turned out to be very highly educated, upper-middle income, and young adult to middle-aged. The Christian Right delegates are well-educated, predominantly lower-to-middle income, and also heavily young adult to middle-aged, although they include a significant portion of senior citizens. The most striking difference between the groups is that of gender (Table 1). Whereas 43.25 percent of the Christian Right delegates are women, that is the case for only 21.25 percent of the journalists.

This finding, which demonstrates the male-dominated character of the political beat, gives an ironic twist to the readiness of journalistic critics of the Christian Right to characterize the movement as hostile to women's playing leadership roles in society. Although it is generally recognized that some of the

¹⁸ There is no northeastern state because of the relative lack of Christian Right activism in that area of the country. Minnesota initially was included in the study as the midwestern state but will be excluded from the current discussion because of the substantially lower response rate to the survey by Minnesota journalists.

¹⁹ The GOP delegates survey included a follow-up mailing. The journalist survey response rate reflects a single mailing.

most prominent leaders of conservative Christian organizations are women, the large proportion of Christian Right women delegates at GOP conventions may come as a surprise. Because participating in party conventions requires substantial time away from the home, it is reasonable to assume that Christian Right women would be unlikely convention delegates. Yet such is not the case. In fact, other studies confirm the active participation of Christian conservative women in GOP convention politics and reveal important issue differences between men and women in the Christian Right (Rozell and Wilcox, 1998).

CHRISTIAN RIGHT		JOURNALISTS	
GENDER	%	GENDER	%
Male:	56.75	Male:	78.75
Female:	43.25	Female:	21.25

Given increased emphasis on professionalization in the news media, the high levels of education among the journalists was to be expected (Table 2). Not a single journalist in the survey lacked a high school degree and fully 97.5 percent had attended college. Over 87 percent are college graduates with nearly half (49 percent) having attended or graduated from a post-graduate program. Among the Christian Right delegates the levels of education are not so high, but still significant, giving the lie to stereotypes of this group as “uneducated.” Two-thirds (67 percent) are college graduates and 32 percent have attended or completed post-graduate education. These are impressive numbers.

CHRISTIAN RIGHT		JOURNALISTS	
EDUCATION	%	EDUCATION	%
Less than high school:	0.20	Less than high school:	0.00
High school graduate:	4.65	High school graduate:	2.50
Some college:	28.08	Some college:	10.15
College graduate:	35.10	College graduate:	38.12
Post-graduate:	31.98	Post-graduate:	49.15

Income differences between the two groups are significant (Table 3). Of course, it should be noted that a survey of journalists is by its nature a study of professionals who are likely to have higher than average salaries. Christian Right delegates are four times as likely to have very low incomes (below \$25,000) than are journalists. The largest income cluster among the Christian conservatives (36 percent) is in the \$25,000 to \$50,000 range, whereas the largest cluster for the journalists (41 percent) is in the \$75,000

to \$100,000 range. Three-fourths of the journalists and one-half of the Christian Right delegates earn over \$50,000 per year. Despite these significant overall differences, perhaps what is most striking is the very respectable level of incomes of the Christian Right delegates—once again at odds with the common stereotype. This group is certainly much more middle income than it is poor.

TABLE 3

Income

INCOME	CHRISTIAN RIGHT	%	INCOME	JOURNALISTS	%
Less than \$25,000:		12.68	Less than \$25,000:		3.40
\$25,000-\$50,000:		35.83	\$25,000-\$50,000:		23.35
\$50,000-\$75,000:		23.33	\$50,000-\$75,000:		22.23
\$75,000-\$150,000:		16.75	\$75,000-\$150,000:		41.28
\$150,000-\$250,000:		8.48	\$150,000-\$250,000:		9.75
Over \$250,000:		1.83	Over \$250,000:		0.00

Age differences between the groups are noticeable but not all that substantial (Table 4). Both groups are about one-half in the 35-to-50-year-old range. There are nearly equal percentages of young adults (up to 35 years of age). The only substantial difference is in the percentages of seniors over the age of 65. There are far more of them (15.3 percent) among the Christian conservatives than there are among the journalists (2.7 percent). There may be no more complicated explanation here than the fact that a survey of a single profession will always reflect a mere tiny percentage of people who are in the typical retirement age category.

TABLE 4

Age

AGE	CHRISTIAN RIGHT	%	AGE	JOURNALISTS	%
To 35 years:		17.85	To 35 years:		15.55
35-50 years:		46.10	35-50 years:		52.10
50-65 years:		20.75	50-65 years:		29.63
Over 65 years:		15.30	Over 65 years:		2.70

The surveys also included measures of religious denomination, church attendance, and religious television viewing patterns. These items help us to understand differences and similarities between the groups in religious commitment and practice. Again, there are some surprises and some expected findings.

Regarding denomination (Table 5), the journalists are heavily mainline religion (29 percent) and agnostic (23 percent). Nonetheless, nearly one in five is an evangelical (perhaps reflecting the heavily southern sample) and nearly that many as well are Catholic. Two-thirds (67 percent) of the Christian Right delegates are evangelicals and only 17 percent are mainline. These findings overall are not surprising.

TABLE 5

Religious Denomination					
CHRISTIAN RIGHT			JOURNALISTS		
TYPE		%	TYPE		%
Mainline:		16.57	Mainline:		29.18
Evangelical:		67.47	Evangelical:		19.65
Catholic:		13.83	Catholic:		18.23
Mormon:		0.50	Mormon:		2.28
Other:		0.67	Jewish:		2.00
None:		0.93	Other:		3.25
			None:		23.03

Church attendance measures show that whereas most journalists go to church, most Christian Right delegates go to church a lot (Table 6). Many would look at these data and conclude that both groups are religious and that group differences in these two surveys are merely ones of degree. But interpretation here depends on the perspective.

Not unexpectedly, the Christian Right delegates are very heavy churchgoers. Nine out of 10 go to church at least once a week and nearly half (48 percent) attend more often. Only two percent said that they attend a few times per year and less than one percent said that they never go to church. Stereotypes of journalists as godless elites don't seem accurate when we consider that 72 percent say they attend church, and more than one-third (36 percent) say they go to church at least once a week.

Some, however, may find it more meaningful to note that in a nation where over 90 percent of the population go to church, 28 percent of the journalists say they never do. Or that nearly one-half (48 percent) either never attend or merely attend a few times each year.²⁰ Under the circumstances, it is easy to understand in light of these numbers why the social conservatives would view the journalists as not sufficiently religious and the journalists would see the social conservatives as hyper-religious.

²⁰ Some people attend church a few times a year for reasons unrelated to worship (e.g., accompanying family on holidays) and their religious commitment is actually closer to those who answered "never."

TABLE 6

Church Attendance				
CHRISTIAN RIGHT			JOURNALISTS	
ATTENDANCE	%		ATTENDANCE	%
Twice or more per week:	48.35		Twice or more per week:	9.70
Once a week:	40.63		Once a week:	26.15
More than once per month:	8.05		More than once per month:	16.30
A few times each year:	2.30		A few times each year:	19.73
Never:	0.70		Never:	28.15

A final religious measure is religious television viewing (Table 7). Not surprisingly, the delegates watch a lot of religious programming. One third (33 percent) watch religious programs at least once per week and two-thirds (67 percent) watch such programming more than once per month. Eighty-eight percent watch at least some religious broadcasting.

By contrast, only six percent of the journalists watch religious programming once a week or more; one in four watch it at least once per month; and fully 40 percent never watch it. When we consider, as some journalists noted in their surveys, that those who watch religious broadcasting may do so only because they cover religion or the political activities of religious broadcasters, the amount of religiously motivated watching of such programming is unquestionably smaller than the surveys imply.

The overall differences in religious broadcast viewing certainly reflect the very different cultures of the social conservatives and the journalists. The social conservatives rely strongly on religious broadcasting networks and stations not only for faith-based programming, but also for news and perspective on current events. Mainstream journalists tend not to rely upon such sources for news and current events analysis.

TABLE 7

Religious Television Viewing				
CHRISTIAN RIGHT			JOURNALISTS	
VIEWING	%		VIEWING	%
Twice or more each week:	7.95		Twice or more each week:	2.80
Once a week:	25.55		Once a week:	3.30
More than once each month:	33.60		More than once each month:	19.98
A few times each year:	20.05		A few times each year:	33.58
Never:	12.83		Never:	40.30

The surveys also examined attitudes toward leading national political figures (Table 8). Here, the measurement instrument is a “feeling thermometer,”

where delegates were asked to record their feelings toward political figures on a scale of zero to 100. Zero reflects a really “cold” attitude and 100 an especially “warm” feeling for that person. The Christian Right delegates and the journalists agree on one person: They both dislike Ross Perot. Otherwise, the differences between the groups are substantial.

For the Christian conservatives, there are especially strong feelings of affection for Ronald Reagan (92 percent), and very positive feelings for Pat Robertson (79 percent), George Bush (71 percent), and Jerry Falwell (64 percent). Besides being decidedly cool to Ross Perot (26 percent), they feel utterly frigid towards President Clinton (five percent). Indeed, for some of the Christian Right delegates, zero was not a low enough rating for Clinton. Some penned in the margins negative scores and in some cases added nasty comments about the president. Perhaps the one surprise is the strong showing in the surveys for George Bush, given that many socially conservative leaders today describe him as more of a “county-club” Republican than a true Christian Rightist.

TABLE 8

Approval Level for Selected National Political Figures					
CHRISTIAN RIGHT			JOURNALISTS		
NAME		MEAN %	NAME		MEAN %
Ronald Reagan:		91.72	Ronald Reagan:		57.87
Ross Perot:		26.30	Ross Perot:		25.22
Bill Clinton:		4.97	Bill Clinton:		47.91
Pat Robertson:		78.52	Pat Robertson:		14.57
George Bush:		71.20	George Bush:		52.84
Jerry Falwell:		63.56	Jerry Falwell:		12.16

The stereotype of journalists—which numerous surveys have shown does not lack some basis in truth—is that almost all are liberals. For the party identification question in our survey of journalists, a plurality (44.9 percent) chose Independent, while those who expressed a party preference chose the Democratic over the Republican Party by nearly a two-to-one margin (34 percent to 18 percent). This finding reflects the common wisdom, although perhaps not as strongly as many conservative critics of the media might have expected.

Indeed, the survey data show the journalists with no noticeable partisan preferences in their feelings toward top Republicans and Democrats. They give average rankings to presidents Reagan (58 percent), Bush (53 percent), and Clinton (48 percent). These rankings of presidents of course may reflect perceptions of personal character, leadership acumen, and other variables that have no bearing on ideological preferences. The relatively strong ranking for President Reagan most likely reflects the journalistic perception of leadership

success more than any ideological or partisan preference. And it is widely known that many journalists do not have warm feelings toward President Clinton because of his personal flaws and his manifest disrespect for the mainstream news media, although none of them gave him a sub-zero ranking or called him vicious names. The largest schism concerns feelings of affection toward the two prominent religious broadcasters. Journalists dislike Robertson and Falwell almost as deeply as the Christian conservatives dislike President Clinton, ranking Robertson at 15 percent and Falwell at 12 percent.²¹

Taken as a whole, the surveys tell us that many of the expected differences between members of the Christian Right and journalists have a basis in reality. The socially conservative political activists make respectable incomes and the journalists earn somewhat more. The social conservatives have high levels of formal education and the journalists have very high ones. The social conservatives all belong to a religious faith and most go to church a lot. Most journalists belong to some organized religion and attend church. Most social conservatives watch religious programming on television with some frequency, while a smaller majority of journalists watch at least some such programming. Yet although the two groups differ, the differences are not so stark as to justify common stereotypes of one group as poor, ill-educated, and politically unsophisticated, and the other as elitist despisers of ordinary church-going Americans. And it is important to bear in mind that the demographic characteristics of journalists do not in themselves indicate anything about the way they cover religion and politics.

So how do journalists learn about the religious factor in politics? Who are their sources and do they use these sources effectively? Our survey indicates that, contrary to claims by some social conservative leaders and activists, journalists listen to the views and positions of religious-based political groups. The journalists do listen to some groups much more than others. And the groups they tend to listen to are those that are better organized and have the resources to contact newspaper reporters and editors.

²¹ Conservatives of course have long argued that the mainstream press is overtly pro-Democrat and liberal. Academic studies offer a portrait of journalists instead as anti-politician, anti-institution more generally. As many have pointed out, reporters love a good scandal far more than they love Democrats. As noted at the outset of this chapter, U.S. senate candidate Oliver North made blasting the supposed liberal biases of the press a staple of his campaign rhetoric. North instead was the beneficiary of press coverage that gravitated toward the interesting story of his celebrity-type candidacy. I attended North's nominating convention in 1994 as an observer and the evening prior to his selection by the Virginia Republican convention I ate dinner at a Richmond restaurant with a group of reporters covering the convention. Reporters from the New York Times, Richmond Times-Dispatch, Washington Times, Associated Press, and others were there. At one point in the conversation several of the reporters spoke openly of their hope that North indeed would prevail over his challenger, the admittedly boring former OMB Director James Miller III. They spoke of their self-interests being served by a North candidacy, assuring the locally based reporters of front-page stories and greater professional prominence. One reporter said to the laughter of the group that when North "gets the nomination tomorrow, we'll have to constrain ourselves from running around the press room giving each other high-fives." Sources of press bias are often other than political or ideological.

Almost all of the respondents in the journalist survey said that they have received literature from religiously based political advocacy groups. Over 93 percent of the journalists said that they took the time to read such literature. Not many said that reading such literature changed their minds or made them report or edit the news differently. A strong majority (64.5 percent) said that reading the literature of these groups had no influence at all on decisions whether to use such groups as resources for stories. Only 22.6 percent said that reading the literature made them “more likely” to use such groups as resources, and 12.9 percent said that this literature made them “less likely” to use these groups as resources in stories.

Nonetheless, the journalists reported that receiving unsolicited literature was the most common way in which they became aware of the political activities of religious political advocacy groups in their communities. The second most common method was for the journalists to seek out sources for story angles and quotes on their own initiative. The third method was observing group leaders and activists at hearings, demonstrations, and other public forums. The fourth was to learn of these sources through reporting in other news outlets. The least common method was through referrals from other journalists.

The journalists reported receiving literature from a variety of religiously based political advocacy groups. Not surprisingly, the most frequently cited group in the survey was the Christian Coalition, with Focus on the Family coming in a distant second. Although many other groups were mentioned, these two are in a league of their own when it comes to contacting journalists through unsolicited mailings. Rarely did a journalist mention any nonconservative religious-based political advocacy group as having contacted him or her.

Two-thirds of the journalists reported receiving news packets and informational literature from religiously based political advocacy groups. The groups also supplied names of local contacts and lists of spokespersons, but the journalists reported using these sources only occasionally.

The journalists reported significant use of representatives of religiously based political advocacy groups in their stories. Only two percent said that they “never” use these representatives as sources. Not surprisingly, the use of these sources tends to center around those policy issues associated with politically active religious organizations, with abortion and gay rights leading the list. Journalists also reported using these sources with some frequency on race and affirmative action, gambling, and welfare reform—but not on foreign policy, immigration, or drug policy.

The data make it clear that journalists are not slighting religiously based political advocacy groups and their representatives. They report hearing from such groups, seeking out their representatives, and using them in stories. Perhaps the one thing missing is a diversity of groups consulted for stories. Our findings reveal that news consumers in the four states hear a lot about the Christian Coalition and something about Focus on the Family, but not many

other groups. Organizations that comprise the “Religious Left,” such as the Interfaith Alliance, almost never show up in the journalist surveys. The picture of politically active religious advocacy groups presented in the news may, in fact, be too narrow—not only in terms of the range of activist religious organizations but also in terms of the range of issues increasingly of interest to the conservative groups that dominate media coverage.

Journalists covering the Christian Right need to seek out a greater variety of sources from within the movement than is typically the practice today. That means contacting many different organizations and individuals capable of offering greater insight into movement politics. My earlier studies (with Clyde Wilcox) of the Christian Right movement in Virginia revealed that among the numerous social conservative groups that are active in state and local politics there, the Christian Coalition is at best the third most influential. The Family Foundation plays the most prominent role among social conservative groups in the state in grass roots organizing and legislative lobbying. Numerous, small, locally based organizations are very active in the state on school issues and issues pertaining to Internet access and reading materials available at the public libraries (Rozell and Wilcox, 1996). Much of this locally based political activity that comprises a major part of the Christian Right movement is barely recognized in news accounts.

Indeed, reporters not only need to go beyond the standard sources for information on the Christian Right, they also need to broaden their issues discussion to reflect the emerging agenda of the movement. Although much of the emphasis in coverage of the Christian Right understandably is on the issue of abortion, much of the movement energy today is directed toward education vouchers, public school curricula, and Charitable Choice. My in-depth interviews with movement leaders and activists make it clear that public school issues are the most powerful in mobilizing the Christian Right. At the turn of the century, theirs is a movement in transition. Without a better understanding of who they are, what they believe, and where they hang their hats, reporters are going to lose the thread of the story.

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Social Movements and Religion in Contemporary American Politics

Rhys H. Williams

The American political landscape has long been notable for the presence and prominence of social movements. Scholars generally define social movements as organized groups that act consciously and with some continuity to promote or resist change through collective action. The key points in the definition are that groups pursue organized collective action, efforts that are sustained over time. That distinguishes social movements from ephemeral crowds or mobs, but also distinguishes them from “insider” political groups such as lobbying associations.

Many American social movements have been grounded in religious values and ideas, from the 19th-century American Protective Association and Anti-Saloon League to the Christian Coalition, Operation Rescue, and Pax Christi today. But the more things have changed, the more have they not stayed the same. Religion continues to be a source of people, organizations, and ideas for both liberal and conservative movements. However, over time American social movements have had to change their targets, strategies, and the nature of their constituencies in order to keep up with the increasingly national character of American politics.

In the early days of the Republic, American politics was intensely local. Locally prominent men directed public affairs in various combinations and coalitions. Concerns were local, causes were local, and the impact of political action was usually local. Then, in the period just before the Civil War, political parties began to take the basic shape we now recognize, aggregating local and regional interests into national ones by means of campaign platforms, broad-based coalitions, and electioneering techniques designed to reach mass audiences. Parties began to be professionalized, organizing themselves nationally and carving out a distinct set of tasks that were legitimately and uniquely theirs.

Beginning in the ante-bellum period, social movements arose that were concerned (among other things) with slavery, alcohol, and Catholics. These movements tended to be episodic and ephemeral, and consistently had their issues siphoned off by the major parties. It was a pattern that continued into the 20th century. By then, new immigration had produced a second wave of nativism; industrialization had led to the crisis in agriculture that spawned populism; and both helped produce what came to be known as Progressivism. Yet

all of the above were absorbed into the consolidating institutional structure of the parties and thereby into the federal government.

In the 20th century, the United States developed a truly national politics. Social mobility, economic integration, and increasing information technology knitted the country together. Political issues became less local, and with the exception of race, less regional. By mid-century the political landscape was dominated by two parties, each of which had a solid constituency base, composed of a coalition of different social and economic groups. The New Deal coalitions produced several decades of electoral stability, built on such certainties as the “solid South.”

Over the past half century, this dynamic has changed considerably. The political parties have declined in importance—now essentially acting as fund-raising conduits. De-alignment has loosened both sides of the New Deal coalitions. Increasing numbers of Americans identify as “independents,” and running on an “anti-party” campaign platform has never been more popular. Rival politicians are often dismissed as party hacks, bringing to mind images of corrupt ward-healers and soviet-style apparatchiks. That people inside the Washington Beltway take their party affiliations so seriously is derided as “partisanship,” and further helps distinguish them from “real Americans.” In short, although parties still matter enormously in the institutional workings of established government, they have lost their place as the culturally approved way of organizing political attitudes and loyalties.

Not that de-alignment has reduced the nationalization of American politics. To the contrary, it is an indication of the increasing regulation of life by national governmental institutions, and an increasingly national “culture” knit together through entertainment, news, and advertising media. (Although markets may more and more be sliced along lines of ethnicity, gender, and life-style, the slices are increasingly national themselves—as in the case of Hispanic Americans, who are less divided than previously by region and locale.) New technologies have of course abetted these social and political developments; the growth of telecommunications has made the interconnectedness of the national economy more apparent, and facilitated national responses to government policy.

For their part, social movements have increasingly aimed at influencing national politics through federal action, with Washington, D.C. becoming center stage even when the original cause of grievances is not there. Thus the civil rights movement’s 1963 March on Washington dramatized and nationalized its cause even as its targets of protest remained in the South. A more recent example is the 1997 Promise Keepers rally in Washington—a rally that was even accompanied by many denials that the movement had a political agenda. But the city is the symbolic heart of the nation, and is the venue par excellence for nationalizing a movement’s message.

In its efforts to capture public offices and govern, a political party must create an internal coalition of often heterogeneous groups, compromise on often

mutually exclusive principles, and aggregate competing interests. It succeeds by balancing interests and creating wide appeal, not through the uncompromising pursuit of a single cause. By contrast, a social movement arises to address a grievance, whether wide-ranging or narrow. Recruiting participants and solidifying their loyalty is a movement's first challenge, and a continuing one.

Sitting astride a social movement there can usually be found one or more "social movement organizations" (SMOs)—entities that seek to galvanize it and direct its course. Where political parties can offer jobs and influence to induce participation, SMOs are by definition challengers that do not have ready access to political spoils. They can promise future benefits, but that is a method of recruitment that generates a loyalty dependent upon observable, tangible victories. To deal with more immediate recruitment needs, SMOs must create solidarity around a cause, a principle, or a collective identity. As a result, social movements are often more vibrant than parties or interest groups (e.g., industry lobbies), but they are also more fragile. Who counts as a "member" is hard to define; a member is harder to win, and harder to keep.

The passions that often attend dedication to a single issue are also conducive to social movement involvement. If material interests are not at stake directly, then moral commitments and a sense of personal identity must keep people motivated to stay involved. Those passions are often difficult to extend over a number of issues. Certainly many people have a number of concerns about the state of society—that is, multiple and (possibly) related grievances. Focusing those concerns on a single issue (or a small set of issues) can provide the intensity necessary for what is essentially volunteer activities outside normal routines of living. Thus, for reasons built into the very nature of the organizational form and purpose, single-issue politics is anathema to political parties and legislative coalitions, but is comfortable turf for many SMOs.

SMOs need to establish an injustice that will require remedial action; they need to establish the dimensions of identity that distinguish the "us" and the "them" of political conflict; and they need to establish the sense of agency that such change can in fact be accomplished. The less an SMO can rely on organizational routine for these things, the more it will have to escalate its appeals in public forums. But all SMOs need these requirements fulfilled, and this helps explain much of the radicalization of movement rhetoric in public politics.

Consider the "culture wars" argument of recent years. Study after sociological study demonstrates that the American public is not divided into two polarized, warring camps. Public opinion is more diverse, less radical, and not nearly as coherent as the image of a culture war suggests. Further, it is even a matter of dispute which issues get considered as part of the culture war; issues of cultural and social morality play differently from economic issues. But SMOs on both sides find that culture wars style rhetoric is helpful, perhaps even essential. The rhetoric helps convince us that there is a moral struggle going on in which the sides are clear and the cause imperative. Notice, how-

ever, that the language comes not from the center of institutional power but from movement activists—from candidates who run as crusaders, not those who run as organization men and women with the potential to actually win. Further, to the extent that electoral campaigns are like social movement efforts, the culture wars language is particularly apt, but fades as more institutionalized political routines take over.

Coordinating political action at a national level often requires bureaucratic and professionalized levels of formal organization far exceeding local and grassroots efforts at social change. Organization is hardly new to movement politics. Labor unions have used highly centralized and bureaucratized organizations for decades—a fact that not coincidentally often results in criticisms of them for being more like corrupt political parties than like social movements. But the contemporary social movement scene has a new version of the social movement organization—something scholars call “professional social movement organizations” (PSMOs).

Unlike labor unions, PSMOs do not necessarily rely on preexisting constituencies. They often try to build a membership across a number of social categories and groups, but one that is rallied around a particular attitude or commitment. They usually do not offer services or material benefits, but rather focus advocacy on social and political change. They both lobby (a more institutionalized political tactic) and organize protests outside of the standard channels for expressing influence. At the same time, they rely on professional staffs, routinized actions, and organizational hierarchies, thus becoming established players within an issue domain. PSMOs such as the National Organization for Women, the Sierra Club, or the National Right-to-Life Committee are now major players on the political scene.

There is something slightly oxymoronic in the idea of a professional social movement. If social movements are to be thought of as challenges to the status quo that rely on passion and volunteer action, how can they be professionalized? And if a PSMO is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and is tackling national issues with a paid staff, how faithfully does it represent the ideas, beliefs, and commitments of local rank-and-file or grassroots constituencies? How did this new organizational form come about?

In the mid-1970s, scholars began to notice that the social changes of the “60s” had produced a general culture of protest, creating a “social movement industry” of organizational networks, organizing techniques, and, most importantly, experienced activist-organizers who were available to bring their expertise to any social issue deemed worthy. Professional activists were people with organizing experience in a variety of movements, and their organizing was often done as full-time employment. Focused on the “supply-side” of social movement activity, this analysis assumes that social dissent is relatively consistent and (usually) widespread, and thus that the problem is not the extent of the demand for social change but the resources to achieve it. The resources

include organization, money, and members, as well as less tangible items like ideological appeal and symbolic legitimacy. These are the very things that social movement professionals can help supply.

This is not intended to be cynical about “hired gun” activists. Most of them believe deeply in what they are doing, do not work for just any cause, and rarely get rich in the effort. What has become significant is their ability to make their vocational attempts at social change into occupations. There is a well documented spillover effect among activists: Those who gain experience in one movement cause often go on to get involved in other causes, and their knowledge spills over into later efforts. The influence on the women’s movement of the large numbers of young women who were first active in the civil rights movement is an excellent example. A technological offshoot of this development is that of activists who specialize in a particular technique needed by SMOs, such as direct mail solicitation or polling, and who sell their services to a variety of organizations or causes. All in all, professional activism, supported by a variety of issues and constituencies and oriented toward a national political scene, has become a major force in U.S. politics in the past 30 years.

This supply-side approach, usually referred to as the “resource mobilization” perspective by sociologists, recognizes the advantages that formal organization brings to social movements attempting to change society. Formal organization facilitates strategy development, eases communication networks, coordinates fund-raising and recruitment, facilitates faster decision-making through chains-of-command, and aids in public recognition. Organizations ensure a consistent flow of the resources necessary to pursue public agendas, and when they work well, distribute those resources efficiently even as they regenerate them.

The development of PSMOs has advantages for elected officials as well. They bring predictability to single-issue politics by focusing and channeling ideological claims, giving officials a clear opposition leader to engage, and being available for the type of compromise negotiation that is the mark of pluralist party politics. While many professional activists cannot “deliver votes” the way traditional ward bosses could, they nonetheless provide a unified, coherent symbol. Prominent activists act as opinion leaders, or cues, for people who cannot keep up with the intricacies of policy debate and development. And elected officials can use appearances or meetings with recognized leaders of SMOs to send powerful media messages about a politician’s sympathies or commitments. Certainly the media are adept at recognizing and interpreting these gestures. Visible, national, professional activists can be important symbolically, whatever the policy reality. In a word, PSMOs are useful not only to challengers of the status quo but also to the status quo itself.

Of course, it is a form of cooptation when officials use PSMOs in this way. While representatives of a movement are invited “into the game,” the game itself is one of insider politics where officialdom has more resources and expertise. This highlights another important difference between established politi-

cal institutions, such as bureaucracies or parties, and social movements. SMOs do not have the presumption of legitimacy that goes with established government. Their stock in trade is calling issues to public attention, generally in moral terms. Going into the backrooms of deal-making and compromise cuts them off from their most potent symbolic weapons as well as from their most impassioned constituencies (who are not, after all, established political actors).

Moreover, the organizations themselves have to be maintained. The more nationally oriented, technologically sophisticated, and staff-heavy they are, the more support they need to keep themselves running. And, as in any labor market, the more talented the professionals hired, the more they cost in salaries and other sunk costs. An increasing proportion of the resources raised must thus be channeled into the organization itself. To complicate matters, a social movement is likely to be composed of several SMOs with similar goals and overlapping constituencies. While allied politically, they also become competitors for resources, tapping the same sources for funds, volunteers, and attention. Energy expended on differentiating themselves from other SMOs is that much less for the main mission.

These tensions for PSMOs are clearly illustrated by the current dilemmas of the Christian Coalition. The Christian Coalition appears to have fallen between the two stools of galvanizing followers with moral imperatives and being a player able to broker deals in Beltway politics. Perhaps the crucial moment was the 1996 attempt by Ralph Reed to keep the Coalition in the center of the Republican campaign effort, even as Dole contemplated backing away from the GOP abortion plank so as not to antagonize the center. Reed was criticized severely by social conservatives, many of whom were in fact the Coalition's organizational competition within the Christian right. Shortly thereafter he left the organization to become a pure insider—a paid consultant to GOP pols. And the Coalition seems to have lost its way—too grass roots to become just another Beltway lobby, too close to the GOP to mobilize a movement. On the national stage this year it seems to have few options but falling in line behind the heir apparent. From a historical perspective, this may be another example of a potential third party challenge—by that I mean the Christian right generally—being absorbed into one of the major parties.

When organizational forms solidify with greater professionalism and bureaucracy, it also tends to produce more rigidity in movements' strategies and tactics. The sit-in, the boycott, the march, the letter-writing campaign—all are available to almost any movement, and in fact are used in a great variety of causes. But a given group is likely to specialize. This hones its abilities, gives it expertise and legitimacy, and provides visibility—witness the United Farm Workers' grape boycott or Operation Rescue's clinic blockade. By the same token, the signature tactic can lead to ossification and impotence, as the powers-that-be learn how to respond effectively. At the same time, as movements shift tactics in order to remain effective, they run the risk of leaving their constituencies behind.

The anti-abortion movement, for example, adopted increasingly radical and violent tactics in the face of its failure to achieve its goal. But different people seem geared for different types of protest. Thus, while there may have been some disaffected National Right-to-Life Committee people who began blockading clinics with Operation Rescue, the bulk of the latter's constituency were not active in more peaceful and legal protest. Similarly, Operation Rescue members have by and large not participated in the recent violence perpetrated by people associated with groups like the Lambs of God. Under consistent pressure from the government, Operation Rescue's clinic-blockade tactic has been stymied; and the organization has withered accordingly.

In sum, social movement organizations range considerably from highly organized and bureaucratized operations like the Christian Coalition to loosely organized, almost haphazard bodies like Promise Keepers to ephemeral "happenings" and kitchen-table operations with little more than a name, a letterhead, and a website.²²

But organization matters. Promise Keepers' very disdain for professionalism and formal organization has generally ruined the movement as a national presence. By systematically refusing to nurture the organizational side of the movement, Promise Keepers has been unable to build on its once considerable momentum. Local groups continue to function, but more as support and prayer groups than as any presence in the public sphere. It is an open question whether the rank-and-file who participated in stadium rallies would have followed a professionalized leadership into more politicized or institutionally focused action. But that option is clearly not available now, with the national presence in disarray.

Religiously based social movements and SMOs such as the anti-abortion movement or Promise Keepers are in many ways similar to secular ones. We live in a society in which all organizations tend to take similar forms—thanks to tax laws, accounting practices, and the standard corporate model of governance by boards of directors. Yet religion has distinctive contributions to make, both organizationally and rhetorically.

Churches are possessed of available meeting places, recognized leadership, fund-raising capacities, and connections to many parts of the communities in which they exist. Above all, churches are groups of people already connected by social networks and used to cooperative activity. Typically people do not "join" social movements as isolated individuals; more often, they get drafted into participating in activities that other people they know are participating in—social networks, not isolates, make up movements. Local church congregations are exactly that—connections of social networks.

²² A promising area for investigative reporting would be to look at the effect of the Internet on movement activity. While it is certainly a good system for connecting activists across vast areas, I suspect that the individualized nature of participation siphons off some of the ability of groups to generate collective action. Individuals may find comfort and solidarity in chat rooms, but movement groups may well be hamstrung by that dynamic. And the temptation for every webmaster to form his/her own organization may splinter movements beyond effectiveness.

Further, religious congregations are generally fairly homogeneous groups of people. The voluntarism that governs religious participation in this culture means that people “self-select” for the religious associations they are involved in. Racial segregation is a well-known feature, but congregations are also divided by ethnicity, economic class, and locality (sometimes neighborhood). They are, as a rule, fiercely local organizations in both resources and orientation. So tapping into congregations can provide access to large numbers of similar, and connected, people.

These organizational resources have helped start a number of social movements, the civil rights movement and the Christian right among the most prominent. Both used congregations as the focal point for early movement activity, before more general SMO forms developed. Churches also play important roles in supporting Pax Christi, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a number of anti-abortion groups, various environmental causes, and the Witness for Peace groups that have protested U.S. policy in Central America for the past two decades. In addition, churches are often important players in local controversies—homeless shelters, sex education in local schools, gambling initiatives, etc.

In the case of the Sanctuary movement for Central American refugees in the 1980s, congregations organized as such to oppose government policy. But while congregations play crucial roles in recruiting, advertising, and helping to get a collective action effort started, for the most part they do not become SMOs themselves. This is true at least in part because churches are multi-purpose organizations that serve a variety of social and spiritual needs for their congregants. Any church that turns itself into an advocacy SMO risks losing those other aspects of its existence and alienating substantial parts of its membership (not to mention the possibility that political activity could place the congregation’s tax exemption at risk).

The tension between spiritual nurture and social activism is particularly acute in religious groups that employ a “congregational” polity—that is, where there is no denominational structure or bishop to wield religious authority above the congregation. In such settings, clerical leaders usually depend completely on the congregation for their salaries. Any political activity that split the church could cost the pastor her or his livelihood (along with violating the professional pride in keeping one’s church growing and prosperous). Thus, while many anti-abortion groups draw their members from conservative Protestant congregations, and sometimes use church facilities for meetings, the clergy themselves are rarely leaders of such groups. They tend to tolerate rather than lead or encourage such efforts. Interviews with activists often reveal a bit of impatience with the tentativeness of clergy on their favorite issues. But the organizational consequences show why spinning off separate SMOs is an advantage.

Religion is also a great provider of the rhetoric and symbols that a social movement needs both to attract members and to persuade the public. It is

important to recognize, however, that the same religious language cannot necessarily perform both tasks. Ironically, the religious language that best mobilizes church members is often that which is most likely to raise the suspicions of the public at large, while the language most accommodating to public sensibilities is least likely to mobilize the faithful.

Religion offers a moral language of good and evil, of justice and injustice. It makes causes about more than just material interests, and it offers people a language of motivation and sacrifice with which to understand their involvement. It clearly divides the sides of any given issue into those who are on the side of light versus those who are not—us and them. The responsibility for action is placed firmly on believers' shoulders, just as the action is sanctioned within a larger schema of history and meaning. In this context, even defeats can be turned into victories and interpreted as necessary sacrifice and trial. Combined with the social networks of religious believers, religious language can produce both passion and perseverance in collective action.

Moreover, moral and religious language is clearly and easily understood by large portions of the American people as a way of understanding our public life. Not only are Americans generally religious as a people, but religion has a deep, public, cultural legitimacy. And yet, narrow sectarian language has in fact receded as a public language, particularly as a public political language. Morality and moral language is vitally important, as well as a type of civil or civic religious language (which understands the nation as divinely blessed). But these must be, at least on the surface, nonsectarian, inclusive, and embracing. Indeed, there is some expectation that a civil religious language of critique—calling the nation to account for its lapses—should itself be framed in positive and optimistic terms. Our public religious language has an important debt to the idea of “progress.” Even in cases where many people do not agree with a movement's stated position on an issue, they will view favorably the religious language in which it is pitched, so long as it is the “right” type of public religious language.

Thus, religiously based social movements must strike a delicate balance in their relations with the media. To the extent that they want to reach potential recruits, raise money from sympathetic constituents, and goad people into action, fiery rhetoric full of clearly sectarian language may be the best tool. But to the extent that they want to persuade bystanders, lure elected officials to their position, or participate in institutionalized public processes, they need a civil religious language that maximizes similarities, plays to moderation, and speaks in general abstractions. Overplaying one side of this balance can leave an SMO either without fervent constituents or without greater political influence.

The differences in media presentation between the early years of the Moral Majority, and the direction taken by the Christian Coalition under Ralph Reed, illustrate how each direction has potential pitfalls. The sectarian message of the Moral Majority, particularly one episode when a leading Baptist minister told an audience that God does not hear the prayers of Jews, alienat-

ed many Americans, and equated the Moral Majority name with intolerance. Despite protests to the contrary, the group never shook the impression that they were really composed of a narrow segment of culturally and religiously fundamentalist Protestants. As director of the Christian Coalition, on the other hand, Ralph Reed used to speak generically of “people of faith,” potentially opening the door to ecumenism and civil religion.

All SMOs require the media to get the message out, but less formally organized groups need the media more. They have fewer symbols and rituals with which to develop collective identity, fewer networks for recruiting members, and fewer material incentives to offer potential recruits. Lacking regularized organizational and political routines, they must provide moral shocks and dramatic public actions to gain media attention and galvanize sympathizers into action. The coin of their political realm is public exposure and moral indignation.

Media demands for innovation and conflict give these informal—and often more radical—groups a leg up. There is a proliferation of cable talk shows that trade in confrontation and bumper-sticker logic. Moderation is not rewarded in these settings and the drive to garner attention and distinction pushes advocates to stridency and uncompromising moral positions. That this avenue to influence is self-limited by the institutional structures and demands of policy formation—especially at the national level—should be evident. But in a crowded field of competing movement organizations, many PSMOs may feel that they have little choice.

To be sure, more moderate SMOs may benefit from the existence of radical groups through what sociologists call “flank effects.” Institutional authorities, faced with some radical factions, become willing to deal with representatives of moderation. For example, by the mid-to-late 1960s the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee made Martin Luther King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) seem moderate to many whites who had been worried about Communists in the SCLC just a few years before. But the flank effect can also work in the other direction, forcing moderate groups to move to the edges. If they must compete for resources from within the same pool of sympathizers, moderate SMOs—especially those with large organizations to support—may be pushed to stretch their rhetoric and stridency in order to prove their fidelity to the cause.

Whatever the benefits of radicalism, it is important to bear in mind that many religious SMOs are not solely focused on political change. James Dobson’s “Focus on the Family” and Jerry Falwell’s “Old Time Gospel Hour” have been important bases for Christian right organizing. But that is not all they do. Like ordinary churches, they serve their constituents’ religious and family needs as well. One needs to be careful about assuming that average people using an organization’s services necessarily align completely with its political messages (or if they do agree, that they are willing to be active in that regard). People have the ability to select among many of the media messages

they receive. In some of my own research, I was unable to find direct effects of exposure to politicized religious television; that is, those who watched the moral political televangelists were not much more likely to be politicized than those who watched more traditional, nonpolitical TV preachers. It seemed as though respondents were able to watch such programs largely for their religious content and filter out the politics. Certainly many prominent clergy who have engaged in public politics have had difficulty sustaining their advocacy efforts—Falwell being the best example.

While organizational names, logos, and chains-of-command are meant to provide both the reality and image of unity, that unity should not be assumed. Prominent religious activists use their ideological claims and rhetoric to try to create just such unity—they are not merely expressing the existing preferences of their constituents. It is obviously in their interest to inflate their membership numbers, but it is also in their interest to exaggerate the unity of that membership. Promise Keepers is an obvious example here; a number of sociological studies show that the rank-and-file participants in the stadium rallies have no common political agenda. Another example is the Central American peace movement of the 1980s; while several groups, such as Witness for Peace and the Fellowship of Reconciliation, shared a common goal of opposing Reagan administration policies, the grounds of their opposition and the targets of their actions were often widely divergent. Moreover, SMOs need victories to keep their adherents motivated and the media convinced of their importance. As a result, they will often declare victory on the basis of little evidence, before more sober post-electoral analysis can be done. (Jerry Falwell's 1980 post-election appearance on *Nightline* comes to mind, as do the words of some Seattle WTO meeting protestors—who gave themselves credit for stopping globalization.)

Finally, the separation of the public and private spheres has become deeply entrenched in our society. True, many activists with religiously based messages decry that separation and see an irretrievably close relationship between public and private as necessary for a moral society. But even among evangelical Protestants, that is not the only available perspective. Evangelicalism has grown in the past two decades, and as it has grown it has also diversified. Many devout Christians are less interested in organizing to change government than in simply keeping government out of their lives—in the great American tradition of suspicion of institutions. If they are active at all it is a “defensive” activism that is not easily translated into more ambitious agendas.

In the final analysis, those who put their religious beliefs at the very center of their lives often have reservations about “fellowshipping” with those who do not share their beliefs, whatever their political agreements. To the extent that this reticence coexists with the development of activist religious SMOs, it is yet another sign of the disconnection between the institutions and practices of our political system on one side and the private lives and cultures in which ordinary Americans actually live.

Pietists and Pluralists: Religion and American Politicians

Michael Kazin

After several decades of denial, journalists for secular media organizations have finally grown accustomed to thinking and writing about Americans as people who take their religious beliefs seriously and want politicians to do the same. Leading newspapers regularly commission polls that affirm this basic fact about our society, which Alexis de Tocqueville first remarked on over 160 years ago. For example, in a *WashingtonPost/Kaiser Foundation* survey, conducted during the 1998 campaign, 68 percent of those polled believed religion to be the “most important,” an “extremely important,” or a “very important” part of their lives. And somewhat smaller majorities agreed that religious groups should “stand up for their beliefs in politics” and “take political action in order to protect their rights.”²³

But journalists spend little time examining the spiritual beliefs and behavior of the people to whom all this godly fervor is ultimately directed. When it comes to religion, politicians not named Jimmy Carter are generally assumed to be consummate opportunists with no agenda but the promotion of their own careers and, usually, the success of their party. Only devout Christian conservatives are given an exemption from this most hackneyed of journalistic conventions. And it took well over a decade of reportage on grassroots activism for reporters to write thoughtfully about the piety of politicians like Steve Largent and John Ashcroft.

But the close engagement of politicians with the religiosity of Americans is hardly a new phenomenon. There has never been a president who didn't proclaim his faith in God and his warm support for religious institutions, and three-quarters belonged to a Christian church while serving in the White House.²⁴ This essay surveys how the relationship between American politicians and religion has changed since the early days of the republic and suggests how journalists who cover the contemporary breed of current and would-be office-holders might enlighten us about the ongoing uses of piety by the powerful. Being a historian, I tend to be less impressed by claims to novelty that are a staple of journalism. Yet understanding when and how discontinuities occur is critical to explaining the convergence of politics and religion today.

²³ *Washington Post* 10/29/98, A22.

²⁴ Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Linder, “Civil Religion and the Presidency” (Grand Rapids, 1988), 17.

Perhaps the major continuity over the past 200 years has been the existence of mass movements inspired by a crusading faith. From the sabbatarian, temperance, and abolitionist insurgencies of ante-bellum days through the black freedom and Christian conservative movements of our own time, the nation has seldom lacked for large, fervent, and well-organized armies of holy warriors (most but not all of them evangelical Protestants) who put relentless pressure on politicians to adopt both their rhetoric and their chosen remedies. Politicians, whether or not they were themselves devout, had to respond to this pressure—embracing it, co-opting it, or explicitly opposing the aims of the movement in question. Only in rare instances could an office-holder or candidate ignore such movements when they were growing or at their zenith of influence.

How can one make sense of this relationship between politicians and the religious beliefs of their constituents, particularly those who are willing and able to pressure public authorities to take their concerns seriously? I'd like to offer a three-part model that may help to chart both changes and continuities in this relationship over the past two centuries. Most politicians have acted as either strict pietists willing to enforce conformity to the views of the Protestant majority; tolerant pietists who may have a preference for such views but, in practice, are willing to tolerate a certain diversity of spiritual approaches; and liberal pluralists who, although they are usually members of a particular denomination, seek to avoid making policies that will aid one religious group over another. All three approaches have deep roots in U.S. history. Until the 1930s, strict pietists and the more tolerant variety were the only contenders who had any political power. Since then, pluralists have increased their influence—but always against stiff opposition. Pietists on the Right have learned to speak tolerantly in order to wage their battle with liberalism more successfully, while secularists on the Left mistrust many expressions of religious faith as a cover for oppressive attitudes toward women, homosexuals, and other groups.

These three different approaches helped shape the divisive politics of the early republic, although the conflicts between them never endangered the stability of the nation at a time when established state religions were the norm nearly everywhere else in the world. Most of the leading figures in the Continental Congress and the framers of the Constitution regarded themselves as men of reason who considered Jesus a moral teacher instead of the Son of God. Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton frowned on the type of emotional piety that had earlier shaken the colonies during the First Great Awakening. George Washington belonged to an Episcopalian church but seldom attended services and refused to kneel for worship when he did. Hamilton, when asked why the framers didn't mention God in the Constitution, supposedly replied, "We forgot."²⁵

²⁵ Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), 330.

At the same time, those regions that had been bastions of independence sentiment (New England, eastern Pennsylvania, the southern Piedmont) were also ones where dissenting, revivalistic denominations—Puritans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Quakers—predominated. The popular language of rebellion against the Crown was shot through with warnings about “popish” plots and other “ungodly” conspiracies that came naturally to evangelical Protestants at the time.²⁶ That Anglican ministers overwhelmingly opposed independence and, along with many of their parishioners, fled north to Canada was a great boon to the dissenters’ argument that only they were the true upholders of both Christian piety and republican virtue.

With Anglican Loyalists eliminated from standing, rationalists and orthodox Protestants fought to shape the political culture of the new republic. There were many reasons why the faction led by Jefferson and that identified with John Adams and Alexander Hamilton were at loggerheads during the 1790s and into the first decade of the next century. But one of them was the split between the relative tolerance of Jefferson’s Republicans toward all Protestants, Catholics, and even agnostics, and the censorious stance that many Federalist politicians, particularly in New England, took to any faiths other than their own. Even the deist Hamilton came to believe that, in a turbulent world, the new nation needed the cohesiveness of Calvinist theology and leaders who adhered to the Protestant faith.

A Federalist congress during the Adams administration passed the Alien and Sedition Acts to repress both Irish Catholics and freethinkers whose fondness for the French Revolution they deemed unchristian and thus unpatriotic. Not coincidentally, these groups were the most dependable supporters of Jefferson’s embryonic party. And the Federalists’ disgust for “the wild Irish” mingled ethnic and racial animosities, a long tradition that continues among some anti-Arab politicians today.

Meanwhile, a religious upheaval was beginning that would transform both the spiritual and the political landscape of the entire 19th century. The Second Great Awakening lasted longer (roughly 1800-1835) than the First and reached into nearly every region. The popular press along with inexpensive Bibles and religious tracts spread the good news widely, while canals and pioneer rail lines allowed itinerant evangelists to travel from camp meeting to meeting with unprecedented speed. The Second Awakening also produced a bumper crop of new members for evangelical churches—especially the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians—that were in the forefront of most of the reform movements that burned across the land in the four decades before the Civil War.

The religious tumult in ante-bellum America dovetailed with the rise of a mass democratic politics in which, for the first time in history, most white men

²⁶ For a recent, flamboyant discussion, see Kevin Phillips, *The Cousins’ Wars: Religion, Politics, and the Triumph of Anglo-America* (New York, 1999).

achieved the right to vote and parties emerged to cater to a large and intensely engaged electorate. "As the republic became democratized, it became evangelized," writes historian Gordon Wood.²⁷ Politicians had to be careful, of course, not to alienate any major section of the voting public. But many, for personal and pragmatic reasons, also took positions that signaled their agreement with one or another view of what constituted fidelity to Protestant principles.

The Whig party and most of its leading figures gained allegiance from an upwardly mobile evangelical constituency by voicing a broad moralist critique. Economic progress without self-discipline and piety, warned the Whigs, led inexorably to sin, greed, and debauchery. The party first rode to victory in 1840 with a campaign that portrayed nominee William Henry Harrison as "a sincere Christian" who attended church regularly and took ministerial advice to heart.²⁸ In the North, many Whigs supported the plethora of overlapping reform crusades that aimed to make Americans a people upright and healthy in mind, body, and soul. Whigs were active in seeking to ban mail delivery (or any other commerce) on the Sabbath, in attempts to convert prostitutes and Indians, in establishing rehabilitative prisons and insane asylums, in promoting women's rights, and, most significantly, in seeking to abolish both the saloon and chattel slavery. Southern Whigs, who were often men of property and substance, were far less friendly to such causes, particularly the last one. But even they had to pay obeisance to humanitarian ideals, to the belief that the state ought to be used to improve the morals of America as well as to pave its roads and protect its infant industries.

Whig politicians developed their appeal in opposition to the Democrats who, under the leadership of Andrew Jackson, pioneered in knitting together a coalition of disparate white ethnic and religious groups. As Protestant crusaders, Whigs were suspicious of Catholic immigrants and the political influence they were beginning to wield in cities and in Northern states. Democrats actively solicited such support, while taking care not to criticize the prejudices of ordinary evangelicals. Under Jackson and his successor, the master party builder Martin Van Buren, the Democrats practiced a version of tolerant piety. Jackson himself was of Scotch-Irish ancestry and fiercely defended his Calvinist convictions against Whig critics. But few Democrats favored the perfectionist movements of their day, preferring to let each (white) man pursue wealth, pleasure, and redemption from sin as he saw fit.

Such brief party portraits necessarily highlight distinctions. But many a Whig learned how to avoid sounding so strident that he could not woo a segment of Democrats; while Jacksonians in the South made use of the rhetoric of damnation as often as did their opponents. On occasion, the party images even got reversed. In 1846, Abraham Lincoln, then a lawyer and stalwart Whig, ran

²⁷ Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 230.

²⁸ Quoted in Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York, 1990), 223.

for Congress in central Illinois against a Democrat who was a Methodist minister. The preacher, Peter Cartwright, denounced Lincoln as an infidel because he didn't go to church or parade his piety in public. The clever Whig decided to crash one of his opponent's services. When Cartwright asked "[a]ll who do not wish to go to hell" to stand, Lincoln kept his seat. The minister pounced: "I...observe that all of you save one indicated that you did not desire to go to hell. The sole exception is Mr. Lincoln...May I inquire of you, Mr. Lincoln, where are you going?" "I came here as a respectful listener," Lincoln responded. "I did not know that I was to be singled out by Brother Cartwright. I believe in treating religious matters with due solemnity...I did not feel called upon to answer as the rest did. Brother Cartwright asks me directly where I am going. I desire to reply with equal directness. I am going to Congress."²⁹

Doctrinal rigor in ante-bellum America was generally the province of third parties, the most significant of which were organized and led by Protestant evangelicals. In the 1820s and early 30s, the Anti-Masons briefly zoomed into national prominence with denunciations of the powerful secret society they accused of giving only lip service to Christianity while practicing esoteric rituals that were explicitly pagan in origin. In 1840, the Liberty Party affirmed the strong link between Northern evangelicals and the abolitionist movement with the first uncompromising anti-slavery platform of any political party in U.S. history. And the American, or Know-Nothing, party of the 1850s was filled with pious Protestants who viewed the rising numbers and political influence of Catholics as a threat to the Republic, equal or greater than that posed by the expansion of slavery. Just before and during the Civil War, such alternative voices helped make the language of piety, sin, and redemption a ubiquitous feature of political debate, especially in the North. Recall the words of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and the ironic observation about the warring sides that Lincoln made in his Second Inaugural Address: "Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other." The president's brief speech contained some 14 references to the Almighty and four quotations from the Bible.³⁰

The evangelical consensus held through the rest of the century, as pietists came to grips with life in a new industrial society attracting immigrants from all over the world, most of whom were neither Protestant nor adherents of the Victorian moral code. A new wave of revivalism and moralist politics that some historians term the Third Great Awakening gathered force during the Gilded Age and lasted into the first years of the 20th century. All five presidents from 1877 to 1901 were pietistic Protestants whose devotion was widely known to the public. From Rutherford Hayes, who sponsored the weekly singing of hymns in the White House and whose wife Lucy was a prominent temperance

²⁹ Quoted in Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion* 93.

³⁰ Specifically from Genesis 3:19, Matthew 7:1 and 18:7, and from Psalms 19:9—according to *Ibid.*, 317.

supporter, to William McKinley, who had considered becoming a Methodist minister and taught Sunday school for years, each chief executive was a symbol of a tradition many of his co-religionists felt was in jeopardy. It is no accident that McKinley justified the U.S. colonization of the Philippines in religious terms, telling a group of Methodist clergy in 1899 that Americans had “to uplift and civilize and Christianize” the inhabitants, “and by God’s Grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ died.”³¹ The president’s neglect of the fact that Catholic priests, both Spanish and indigenous, had already “Christianized” millions of Filipinos underlined the religious bias he shared with many Protestants at the turn of the century.

From the end of the Civil War to the onset of the Great Depression, no issue mobilized evangelical energies or caused politicians more trouble than did temperance. For strict pietists, abolishing the commerce in alcohol took on transcendent significance—both because it promised to do away with a social evil that ruined and corrupted millions of lives and because it satisfied the urge to protect and purify a society they feared had lost its moral bearings. The movement received support and resources from some 40,000 individual churches—most of them Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian. And its leaders, in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League, assembled a ferociously efficient machine for lobbying legislators and wooing public opinion.

The issue of alcohol caused deep splits in both political parties and was increasingly difficult to compromise—much like abortion in our own time. Democratic candidates running for president and for statewide office in places like New York and Ohio had to win both the votes of Catholics who were overwhelmingly opposed to outlawing the saloon as well as those of evangelicals whose ministers thundered regularly against “the liquor trust.” Republicans, like their Whig predecessors, could rely on the trust of most evangelicals in the North. But they too had to tread carefully, lest the growing numbers of non-pietists turn out en masse to defeat them. No one in the GOP had to be reminded that, in 1884, James G. Blaine had lost New York State, and perhaps the presidential election, because he failed to repudiate a Protestant clergyman who condemned the Democrats as the party of “rum, Romanism, and rebellion.” Thus, until the triumph of the Dry Army was assured (which didn’t occur until 1917), most major-party politicians, whatever their personal beliefs, behaved as tolerant pietists. Of course, when enforcement of Prohibition proved something of a joke, office-holders outside the mid-American dry belt rushed to claim they had always been against curbing “personal liberty.”

By the 1920s, a century of evangelical dominance was coming to an end. One sign of this was the newly bunkered vision of William Jennings Bryan. Since the 1890s, “the Great Commoner” had been able to link Protestant moralism with anti-corporate reforms popular far beyond pietist ranks. But

³¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

from the end of World War I until his death in 1925, Bryan devoted himself almost exclusively to rescuing prohibition and the literal truth of the Scriptures from what he perceived as their elitist, ungodly foes. The fact that the Democrats almost nominated Catholic Al Smith for president in 1924 and then did anoint him their standard-bearer the next time around signaled that Protestant populism had lost most of its influence in the party that gave it birth. In 1928, Smith lost to Republican prosperity and a desperate wave of bigotry as the GOP broke the wall of the Solid South. But the scion of Tammany Hall brought millions of Catholic voters into voting booths for the first time. Never again would one of the major parties select a presidential candidate who was a forthright champion of exclusively Protestant values.

Five years later, the New Deal initiated an era of liberal pluralism in religious matters that would have amazed 19th-century politicians. FDR's four electoral triumphs depended upon the loyal support of Catholics and Jews and the increasingly strong allegiance of blacks from every denomination. In every presidential campaign during the 1930s and '40s, a majority of white Protestants outside the old Confederacy voted Republican, as they had since the Civil War. But the failure of Prohibition demobilized activists from the evangelical churches, and both Depression politics and the virtual halt to immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe made the old religious battles seem less urgent.

In fact, New Dealers sought to institutionalize a civil religion free from moorings to any single faith. By erecting secular sites like the National Archives and the Jefferson Memorial and hiring muralists to decorate the walls of post offices and libraries with hymns to the nation's past, FDR's administration encouraged citizens to substitute a mildly progressive brand of patriotism for older ethnic and religious loyalties. The president himself, raised as a High-Church Episcopalian, seldom spoke about his own beliefs, hired an unprecedented number of Jews as close advisers, and was adept at such symbolic acts as having both ministers and priests pray at his inaugurations. Under wartime slogans like "Americans All," New Deal publicists urged citizens to regard religious distinctions as matters more of cultural taste than as causes for moral conflict. A few conservative politicians in both parties still waved the banner of Protestant supremacy—more against Jews than Catholics. But they targeted the leftism of figures like labor leader Sidney Hillman, not their religious identity.

During the early years of the Cold War, liberal pluralism (at least with respect to Biblical faiths) gained strength within the political class even as public religiosity and church membership themselves rebounded. It has always been easy to ridicule Dwight Eisenhower's famous declaration (just after being elected president): "Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is."³² But Ike was only

³² *Ibid.*, 184.

stating what many social scientists and theologians were writing about at greater length. Belief in the Almighty and loyalty to the nation had become all but synonymous. Evangelical Protestants had been preaching this gospel since the American Revolution; now any anti-Communist Christian or Jew was invited, even expected to participate in the civil religion. Billy Graham became the nation's most popular preacher, and a confidante of presidents, but usually avoided claiming his faith was superior to others.

Below the surface of Cold War pluralism, however, lay political passions of a less ecumenical nature. John Kennedy had to tread carefully around Protestant fears when he ran for president in 1960. A more devout Catholic than JFK would have had a harder time persuading Protestant clergy and lay people that he would not be a pawn of bishops who had cheered on Joe McCarthy and a Pope bound to uphold the dogma of infallibility. Meanwhile, neither major party encouraged Jewish politicians to have ambitions beyond their enclaves in the big, "ethnic" cities. It was a fitting irony that the first (and only) major-party candidate for president with a Jewish surname was an Episcopalian Republican from Arizona who wanted to roll back the New Deal. Most postwar politicians thus continued to adhere to a version of tolerant piety; they praised "the Judeo-Christian tradition" but assumed, in practice, that Protestants and their modes of worship would always have pride of place.

The cultural conflicts of the mid-60s through mid-70s rearranged this superficially tidy religious landscape. On the one hand, several established institutions shifted to the left. Spurred by the Vatican Council, the Catholic Church underwent a modernist reformation; its parishioners of European ancestry became less distinct from the white Protestant majority in their voting habits and cultural mores as well as in their style of worship. As a consequence, no Catholic candidate for the presidency or vice-presidency since JFK has felt pressure to proclaim his or her independence from Rome. African-American ministers, both Christian and Muslim, pushed their way into mainstream political consciousness for the first time on the wings of the black freedom movement—and the integrationist-minded among them helped revive the Social Gospel on a more tolerant basis, both racially and denominationally, than its Gilded Age creators had intended.³³

However, the doctrine of "social concern" did not inspire many Americans to join the predominately white liberal churches. From the mid-60s to the mid-90s, the fastest growing denominations in America were evangelical ones that catered to whites of the middling classes who sought an intimacy with God that the liberal churches now de-emphasized. The growth of Hasidism and other forms of fervent spirituality among Jews sprang from a similar impulse. All these groups grew increasingly worried about what they perceived as the

³³ The Catholic imagery of the United Farm Workers, a largely Mexican-American and Filipino union, had an analogous impact on politics in the Southwest.

politics of secular amorality—as signified by a Supreme Court that banned school prayer while legalizing abortion.

But this did not signal a return to the stricter pietist tradition. Only rarely did a conservative evangelical draw the old line between his or her faith and all the others.

Increasingly, political lines were drawn between conservatives and liberals in all denominations. Key architects of the new religious right could be Catholics like Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich, or even Jews like Howard Phillips.

National politicians from all kinds of theological backgrounds discovered that being “born again” could boost their careers. In 1988, Michael Dukakis’s secular image—his ACLU membership highlighted, his Greek Orthodox background ignored—helped destroy his sizeable lead in the polls over George Bush, who shed his liberal Episcopalian upbringing to confess a spiritual awakening.³⁴ But such rebirths were rarely accompanied by signs of intolerance toward nonpietists. For politicians like Carter and Bush, religious conviction had become almost a lifestyle decision, a matter of personal choice rather than collective responsibility.

How are these historical trends playing out as we begin the new millennium? Despite their reputation, most activists on the Christian Right have continued to reject the Protestant narrowness of earlier moralist crusades. Stalwart Protestant conservatives like Gary Bauer and Pat Robertson long ago jettisoned the old triumphalism and grew accustomed to working with Catholics in the right-to-life movement and cooperating with American Jews in an uncompromising defense of Israel. The contemporary Christian Right thus practices a kind of conservative pluralism, welcoming into its camp all foes of moral relativism and secular correctness. So far, this stance has been more effective in mobilizing the already convinced than in changing government policy. As the impeachment fiasco demonstrated, Christian moralists can no longer bend the nation to their will as the prohibition movement did eight decades ago.

On the other side, liberals wave the banner of pluralism and accuse the Christian Right of violating privacy rights and the separation between church and state. Yet, most liberals practice their own version of tolerant piety. They tend to dismiss evangelicals as unenlightened foes of cultural and sexual diversity—and are deeply troubled by some of the religious practices of non-Western faiths: Muslim women who veil themselves in public and defer to male authority, Hindu child weddings, the animal sacrifices of Santeria, and more. Rhetorical support for “multiculturalism” aside, most liberals still feel uncomfortable imagining an America not thoroughly dominated by nonmessianic Christians and Jews. For that matter, few politicians of any persuasion have come to grips with the complexity of religions practiced by new immigrants from outside the

³⁴ A point made by Leo Ribuffo in his excellent essay, “God and Contemporary Politics,” *Journal of American History* 79 (March 1993), 1526.

Western Hemisphere or with citizens like those in the Nation of Islam or the white supremacist Christian Identity movement whose faith expresses their deep alienation from the theological as well as the political status quo.

As a result of these developments, hardly anyone with political influence is either a strict pietist or a true pluralist. Those who govern us succeed in keeping religious differences from coming to blows or from determining policy on the major foreign and domestic issues. But if the United States bears no resemblance to Bosnia or Kosovo, neither does it look like the Netherlands, where the state hews to a strict neutrality between religious groups and few people attend church, synagogue, or mosque. We have always been a nation of believers, and that shows no sign of changing soon.

Meanwhile, the personal faith of politicians often defies conventional wisdom. Despite the attention the media gives to Christian conservatives (and to the claim by George W. Bush and other Republican candidates that Jesus is their favorite philosopher), devout politicians are just as likely to be centrists or liberals. In the current Congress, for example, Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) are quite candid about the importance of their faith to the policies they favor; whereas GOP leaders like Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.), Rep. Dick Army (R-Tex.), and House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) do not emphasize the religious wellsprings of their own ideology.³⁵ During the 1998 campaign, Democratic candidates in several heavily Protestant states advertised their "personal relationship with Jesus Christ" and were able to vanquish their conservative opponents.³⁶

In the current campaign for president, it's hard to tell whether Al Gore or George W. Bush is the more zealous Christian. Each endorses "faith-based" approaches to social service provision, criminal justice, and housing. And organized labor, the jewel in Gore's crown of endorsements, is energetically building coalitions with liberal churches, synagogues, and mosques to promote issues like the living wage and protection for immigrant workers.³⁷ Across the political spectrum, tolerant pietism seems the conventional wisdom, with religiosity viewed as a positive force for both social and moral uplift.

Driving this development is an important shift in American religious consciousness since the 1960s. For millions of people, spirituality is no longer bound up with membership in an institution or the practice of certain rituals. Instead, they move with remarkable ease from self-help groups, to yoga classes, to books about angels or Armageddon, to churches that promise help in discovering "the inner self." As sociologist Robert Wuthnow explains, "Faith is

³⁵ Moreover, the only Catholic priest ever elected to Congress, Robert Drinan, was an outspoken liberal who served for a time as chair of Americans for Democratic Action.

³⁶ On Arkansas Senate candidate Blanche Lincoln, see Hanna Rosin, "In Unexpected Ways, Issues of Faith Shape the Debate," *Washington Post* 10/29/98, A1.

³⁷ See my article, "Faith in Labor," *The Nation*, October 11, 1999, 20-22.

no longer something people inherit but something for which they strive.”³⁸ This free-floating, syncretistic form of spirituality is unlikely to decline as individuals move from place to place, job to job, enthusiasm to enthusiasm. Older Christian churches will have to compete aggressively in this unstable market for ideas—or else lease their facilities to more dynamic evangelical groups, which often do not hold their services in English.³⁹

For American politics, this new environment yields contradictory results. On one hand, the specific religious faith of a candidate probably matters less in most locales than it ever has. Jews have been elected to congressional seats in southern Kansas, central New Mexico, southeastern Virginia, and Vermont; while in few districts would a candidate’s Catholicism be a serious handicap.⁴⁰ Of course, it would still be surprising if a major party nominated a non-Christian for president, but it would be even more remarkable if the opposition party made an issue of it. If Dianne Feinstein becomes the Democratic vice-presidential candidate in 2000, her gender will probably draw more comment than her Judaism, which is of a decidedly secular kind.

At the same time, the longing for a life of devotion to spiritual ideals helps create a demand for the kind of self-confident, protective evangelical communities that are the base of the religious right. In the suburb of Olathe, Kansas (near Kansas City), the fastest growing Christian churches offer aerobics, weight-loss, and parenting classes as well as Bible study and Sunday school.⁴¹ In the wake of President Clinton’s acquittal, when Paul Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation advocated that conservative Christians attend to “creating the parallel institutions we need” instead of trying to capture the White House, he was implicitly referring to churches like those in Olathe.⁴²

Most evangelicals have no desire to be political activists and are quite capable of making electoral choices that confound the wisdom of the punditry. But the critique of the immorality and rootlessness of American culture resonates beyond the ranks of right-wing Christians like Weyrich, and politicians are not going to cease mining so rich a vein of discontent. As always in U.S. history, our language of civic idealism is hard to disentangle from our talk about God.

How might journalists make use of the reflections in this essay? At the risk of being presumptuous, I’d like to propose some questions to explore about the connection between religion and politicians. How do individual candidates consider their faith when advocating and/or opposing specific policies? What

³⁸ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 8.

³⁹ For one example from suburban DC, see Michael E. Ruane, “A Church With Four Faces,” *Washington Post* Feb. 21, 1999, A1.

⁴⁰ See map, “The Denominational Composition of the 104th Congress: 1995-1997,” courtesy of Prof. Philip Barlow, Hanover College.

⁴¹ Peter Beinart, “Battle for the ‘Burbs,” *New Republic* Oct. 19, 1998, 29.

⁴² Paul M. Weyrich, “Separate and Free,” *Washington Post* March 7, 1999, B7.

ever happened to the Social Gospel? The religious left is largely unknown to the public but it has a presence in many cities and college campuses.⁴³ How does religious prejudice, whether lingering or revitalized, affect public opinion toward individual politicians? How do sharp differences within specific faiths (charismatic Protestants vs. fundamentalist ones; Reform vs. Orthodox Jews, etc.) affect debates within local and national parties and the conduct of election campaigns? How do politicians negotiate conflicts between the Christian/Jewish majority and new immigrants who practice different faiths? Do politicians believe that a religious 'revival' is occurring? If so, how do they gauge its impact on their campaigns and policies? The answers may be surprising and would help lift reporting on this theme out of the slough of banality in which it is often mired. But one thing is sure: How candidates and officeholders seek to get right with both God and the godly tells us a great deal about the state of our political culture.

⁴³ For some leads, see my article, "The Politics of Devotion," *The Nation* April 6, 1998 and Richard Parker, "Progressive Politics and, uh....God," *The American Prospect* Jan. 17, 2000.

Religion and the Law in American Politics

Marci A. Hamilton

After the Articles of Confederation failed to establish cohesiveness and unity, the Framers of the Constitution faced the task of realigning power so that a stronger and more efficient national entity could emerge. They set about dividing and enumerating powers because they assumed that every entity invested with power would be tempted to abuse it. And they recognized religion as such an entity.

Although many at the time of the framing believed that proper Christian values were necessary for the Republic to survive and thrive, none viewed religion through rose-colored glasses. The Framers assumed that even religious leaders and institutions could and would act in ways that are not virtuous. With most of them coming from a Protestant background, and the largest number educated on Calvinist principles, they hardly needed reminding of the Reformation's lesson that the Church is capable of going astray. One of the striking facts about the Convention is that when discussion turned to religion, it was not to talk about religious liberty but rather to use religion as an example of how yet another social institution could abuse its power.

There is no question that many of those who founded the United States believed in religious liberty. But the definition of such liberty has proven to be complex, dynamic, and profound. The Supreme Court has defined it in terms of the two religion clauses at the beginning of the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law [1] respecting an establishment of religion, or [2] prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The Court has tended to decide religion cases according to these two categories; a law is subjected to a particular analysis depending on whether it fits under the Establishment Clause or the Free Exercise Clause.

Establishment Clause. The cases implicating the Establishment Clause tend to be those that draw the headlines: government-sponsored holiday decorations, prayer in public schools, state aid to parochial schools. They are also the cases that are most likely to be decided on an ad hoc basis, as the courts attempt to divine the appropriate balance between church and state in a given case.

Holiday Decorations. Government-sponsored holiday decorations have been a sore point in the Courts' establishment doctrine for decades. Even though the vast majority of such decorations are celebrating Christ and are therefore Christian decorations, the Court has refused to outlaw them altogether. The Court's reluctance is partially attributable to its satisfaction with the status quo. That is, there is a strong sense in the opinions that the existing balance of

power between church and state is acceptable. Therefore, all church privileges that have been in place for a long time are grandfathered into the Constitution—for example, “In God We Trust” on our coins, prayers at the beginning of legislative sessions, and property tax exemptions for churches. Given the tradition of Christmas decorations in many if not most localities, the Court has been loathe to outlaw them altogether.

Yet, the Court has not given governments *carte blanche* with respect to holiday decorations. Such a display must not endorse a religion or exist for the purpose of promoting religion. Thus, a crèche standing by itself in a city building was found to be unconstitutional while a crèche coupled with a menorah and in place for the purpose of furthering business was not. The Court’s fine distinctions in this area often drive city governments to distraction, but it is helpful to understand that the Court is attempting to achieve what it perceives as a delicate balance between tradition (which has not generated an established church) and present political reality (where churches achieving too much power through public displays still might take advantage of that power).

Prayer in Public Schools As in its other establishment cases, the Court has not resorted to an easy-to-discern rule for deciding school-prayer issues. While it is black-letter law that a public school may not force its students to pray or lead its students in a common prayer, many issues remain open regarding student-led prayer. The most active battleground in recent years has been graduation ceremonies. In its most recent school prayer case, *Lee v. Weisman* (1992), the Court held that an ecumenical prayer during the school’s only graduation ceremony violated the establishment clause because attendance was not truly voluntary (there was no other graduation ceremony to attend) and because those who did not concur in the prayer would have felt left out. A series of cases is now working its way through the lower courts involving graduation prayers led by students rather than clerics and prayers over which the school district exercises minimal or no control.

The prayer issue is not limited to graduation exercises. The Supreme Court recently granted certiorari in a case, *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe* involving student-initiated and student-led prayer at a Texas high school football game. It is likely to be a close case that may well turn on two axes: the degree of school involvement or sponsorship and the degree of voluntariness of those hearing the prayer.

State Aid to Churches or Church Schools Early in the Supreme Court’s Establishment Clause jurisprudence, the Court had the opportunity to take a strict separationist view. It could have ruled that all aid to religion, no matter how small, is unconstitutional. That view, however, has never garnered a majority, or even a plurality, of the Court. Instead, the Court has eschewed a bright-line test in favor of determining whether there is an appropriate balance of power between church and state in each case. These cases are the least predictable in the Court’s jurisprudence and the most likely to recur.

The Court set the tone in its first school aid case, *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), where it upheld a New Jersey state law permitting local school boards to provide transportation to schools, including nonpublic religious schools. Since *Everson* the Court has been asked to address a large variety of schemes that benefited sectarian institutions. Every imaginable aspect of a sectarian school's budget has been the object of state legislation at some point: transportation; books; maintenance and repair; tuition assistance through tax deductions, benefits, or direct grants; teachers' salaries; field trip transportation; test and scoring services; diagnostic and therapeutic services; on-site special education teachers; specially drawn school districts; vocational rehabilitation; interpreters for the deaf; and property tax exemptions.

In this category, the hottest issue—and the one most likely to generate political controversy in the current election year—is public school vouchers, which raise the question of whether governments may provide funds for primary and secondary school students to attend sectarian schools. Despite the fact that most governments are cash-strapped at this time, this issue has gotten a boost from those who are searching for ways to make the public school system more accountable and educational offerings more competitive. Voucher proposals have become especially popular in the Republican Party. The constitutionality of such schemes under the Establishment Clause remains unsettled. As is true of most establishment issues, constitutionality will turn on the particular features of the particular scheme. Some provide funds for nonsectarian schools only and some for only the poor. Too few cases have been decided by the lower courts for the Supreme Court to take review of this emerging social experiment yet.⁴⁴ The crucial distinction at this point appears to be whether the aid is “direct” or “indirect.” See *Agostini v. Felton* (1997). It is likely that the Court will take up a voucher case in the next several years. The outcome, however, is not so easy to predict. Each voucher scheme will be judged according to its own merits. Here, as elsewhere in the Court's First Amendment jurisprudence, results are fact- and context-dependent.

Over time, the Court has wavered on the fundamental question of whether aid to sectarian institutions is benign and therefore to be largely tolerated, or potentially malignant and therefore to be limited. Taking the latter tack, the court in *Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty v. Nyquist* (1974) admonished that a lax establishment doctrine will lead states “openly [to] subsidize” sectarian interests. More recently, in *Mueller v. Allen* (1983), the Court took the former position, stating that “[a]t this point in the twentieth century we are quite far removed from the dangers that prompted the Framers to [adopt the establishment clause]. The risk of significant religious or denomi-

⁴⁴ In recent years, the Court has adopted the attitude of a referee and refuses to take review of a case until it is clear that the lower courts cannot come to agreement on the right legal rule, whether legislative or constitutional, or until it is clear that the lower courts are clearly misguided.

national control over our democratic processes...is remote." Usually, the key to understanding the result in a particular establishment case resides in understanding the Court's attitude on this pivotal issue.⁴⁵

There is no one trend that can summarize the Court's establishment cases. Practices that many would assumed were constitutional in the 1950s, such as the placement of a crèche in front of a town hall, have in recent years been declared unconstitutional. Yet, some types of aid to sectarian schools seem to have become more constitutionally palatable. Of all the Court's constitutional doctrines, its establishment doctrine is the most ad hoc and most likely to surprise.

Free Exercise Clause. In general, the Court determines whether a law violates a constitutional right by weighing the government's interest against the right asserted. Depending on the particular constitutional provision in question, the government's interest receives varying levels of deference. Under the strictest scrutiny, the government must prove that its law was passed for "a compelling interest" and that it mandates the "least restrictive means" of achieving that interest. Intermediate scrutiny lightens the government's burden by forcing it to prove only that it had an "important" or "substantial" interest and that it is appropriately tailored. The most deferential level of scrutiny asks the government only to show that its law is "rational" and the law's means are rationally related to the law's purpose.

While levels of scrutiny may seem like technical mumbo jumbo, they are often critical to understanding not only particular decisions but also the larger issues that may be at stake. For in addition to driving the judicial results, they play into public positions taken by religious claimants and governments, even in the early stages of a dispute, and influence legislative proposals. The levels actually establish the balance of power between church and state in every free-exercise scenario.

Broadly, the Court has identified three categories of free exercise cases: where the law being challenged affects religious belief; where it affects religious conduct; and where it targets a religion for deleterious treatment.

Laws affecting religious belief. There is one bright-line rule in the Court's religion clause jurisprudence: Government may not burden religious belief. The government gets no latitude in this category. The absolute bar to burdens on religious belief has been in place from the beginning of the Court's free exercise jurisprudence in the late 19th century with *Reynolds v. United States* (1878). Although this rule has no flexibility within it and therefore implies the capacity to invalidate a significant number of laws, it has been infrequently employed. The Court has only identified burdens on religious belief in a small number of cases. The vast majority of its cases have addressed burdens on religious conduct.

Laws affecting religious conduct. The largest percentage of cases under the Free Exercise Clause address government burdens on religious conduct. Unlike reli-

⁴⁵ See generally Marci A. Hamilton, *Power, the Establishment Clause, and Vouchers*, Conn. L. Rev. 807 (1999).

gious belief, which is absolutely protected, religious conduct can be regulated consistent with the Free Exercise Clause. With *Reynolds*'s earliest religious conduct case, the Court has declared that no man may become a "law unto" himself.

The Court has not applied a single level of scrutiny in this arena. Rather, it has taken a context-dependent approach. That is, the Court has approached a variety of factual contexts with different levels of scrutiny. For example, military regulations have been treated with deference while unemployment compensation laws have been treated to more vigorous scrutiny. Until 1990, the Court developed its free exercise doctrine in this stepwise fashion, adjusting its level of scrutiny context-by-context as it saw fit.

Assuming a one-size-fits all jurisprudence, many thought (and still claim) that the highest level of scrutiny the Court announced in some of its free exercise cases was the level to be applied in all free-exercise cases. This turned out to be a serious misreading of the Court's free-exercise cases.

In 1990, the Court took on the task of explaining its free exercise jurisprudence in some detail in the landmark case, *Employment Division v. Smith* (the Oregon peyote decision). First, the Court re-emphasized that religious belief was absolutely protected while religious conduct is not. It also alluded to the likely unconstitutionality of laws that discriminate against particular religions.

Then it turned to a longer discussion of its religious conduct jurisprudence. For those who had been watching the context-dependent nature of the Court's free exercise jurisprudence evolve, this decision was not particularly surprising. For others, including many churches, it came as a surprise. The Court stated that it had applied the "compelling interest" test, or strict scrutiny, in only a small number of cases and that it had "abstained" from using the test in a number of recent cases. The Court rejected strict scrutiny in religious conduct cases involving neutral, generally applicable laws. In those circumstances, religious individuals or institutions burdened by such laws were told to turn to the political process to ask for exemptions from such laws. Thus, the Court signaled that accommodation of religious conduct was not mandatory but could be permissible.

The *Smith* case provides a nice example of the Court's holding regarding the Free Exercise Clause and its dictum regarding permissible accommodation through the political process. In that case, Oregon fired two state-paid drug counselors for using peyote, an illegal narcotic. They were denied unemployment compensation because it was not available to those fired for breaking the law. The counselors sued on the grounds that they had used peyote as a part of the rituals of the Native American Church. They argued that the Free Exercise Clause required the state to accommodate their religious behavior and therefore could not enforce its unemployment compensation rules incorporating the narcotics law against them. The Court rejected their argument, saying that the Free Exercise Clause does not mandate an exemption from Oregon's laws.

Immediately following *Smith*, a number of states and the federal government took the Court at its word and enacted legislative exemptions for peyote

use. Thus, exemptions were achieved even though they were not mandated by the Constitution. By leaving exemptions for religious conduct contrary to law to the legislative process, the Court has ruled that exemptions are a matter of public policy. Peyote use for religious purposes was not hard to sell in the political process because peyote is a narcotic unlikely to be widely abused and because it is used for religious purposes by only a small number of people. A much more difficult question for the legislatures would have been, for example, to exempt heroin from the narcotics laws.

Smith generated an outcry from religious entities, which claimed that it gutted the “strict scrutiny” test the Court had announced in some earlier cases. They formed the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion and initiated legislation (the Religious Freedom Restoration Act) at the federal and eventually the state levels to “fix” the standard. This legislation and its progeny are discussed below.

The hard question left open by Smith and the Establishment Clause cases is how far a free exercise exemption can go before it violates the Establishment Clause. For example, the peyote exemptions are likely constitutional because they directly relieve a specific burden on religion without handing religion broader, untoward benefits. To withstand establishment attack, religious conduct exemptions likely must be closely tailored to the specific burden on religious conduct alleged. The threshold question, therefore, is likely whether the law from which the exemption is carved creates a constitutionally significant burden on a religious practice. In *Jimmy Swaggart Ministries v. Bd. of Equalization* (1990), the Court held that the collection and payment of state sales and use taxes did not pose a constitutionally significant burden on religions. On the other hand, a court in California recently upheld California’s exemption of churches from historical preservation laws. As I said, this is the hard question.

The Smith decision also hinted that there are scenarios where the government will have more difficulty justifying its burdens on religious conduct. Discriminatory laws (those that are not neutral) or laws that do not apply generally (those that are created through ad hoc decision-making), would be subjected to stricter scrutiny. And cases involving “hybrid rights,” a combination of constitutional rights, were likely to be subjected to stricter scrutiny as well. The Court has yet to take a case that elaborates on these exceptions to the rule announced in Smith. However, in the free exercise case immediately following Smith, *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah* (1993), the Court made it clear that it was dead serious about applying strict scrutiny to laws that discriminate against particular sects.

Laws that discriminate against particular sects. In *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye*, the Court addressed a city ordinance intended to suppress the religious practices of Santeria, an Afro-Cuban religion whose adherents engage in the ritual sacrifice of animals as part of their ceremonies. In response to the growing presence of Santeria in its midst, the city enacted an ordinance that forbade the “sacrifice” of animals. The Court found that the wording of the law and the

minutes of the council meetings made it clear that this was not a neutral, generally applicable law, but rather a law targeted at Santeria and intended to discriminate against its practices.

The Court held that such a discriminatory law was subject to the strictest of scrutiny. The city lost because it could not prove that the law was passed for a compelling interest or that it had employed the least restrictive means. The language of the opinion is so strong, in fact, that the test appears to be “strict scrutiny” in theory but fatal in fact. Once discrimination against a religious sect is established, it is highly unlikely the law could be found constitutional. Not to be misunderstood, the Court also went out of its way to explain that general laws regulating animal carcass disposal would not necessarily be unconstitutional because they incidentally burdened Santeria. The Court signaled quite clearly that such a law would be constitutional if it were fashioned to apply generally and did not target Santeria. Thus, the constitutional evil was not that the practice of Santeria was curtailed but that it was specifically targeted for deleterious treatment.

In short, the community can insist on law and order and can enact laws for the general welfare even if these incidentally burden religious conduct. The government may not, however, target any particular sect.

Legislation. In recent years, historical developments have created a new epoch in religious liberty legislation. First, the Christian Right gained astonishing political power in the Republican Party up to the federal level. While more than one legal scholar was opining that religion should not be permitted to make its own particularist arguments in the public sphere, the Christian Right’s sure-footed rise to power provided an attractive example for other religious groupings. Religion had always been able to influence policymaking at the local, state, and national levels, but the rise of Christian Right demonstrated anew—and in a very public way—the capacity of religious interests to command political attention in Washington.

Second, the Supreme Court’s free exercise decision in *Smith* prompted many religious entities to protest the Court’s reasoning. Indeed, the response to the decision by many First Amendment scholars and church leaders was vitriolic. Religious and civil rights entities that had rarely united before joined hands to battle the *Smith* decision. In a remarkable moment in history, the left, including the American Civil Liberties Union, joined forces with the far right, including the Christian Legal Society. The consortium named itself the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion and stormed Congress. They drafted the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which was introduced the same year that *Smith* was decided, 1990, and enacted into law in 1993. The Act was a self-conscious attempt to overrule the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Free Exercise Clause in *Smith*. Like the Constitution in its scope, it would have subjected every law in the country to the strictest of scrutiny if it incidentally burdened religious conduct.

The Act was drafted in broad, arcane terms that are normally reserved to the courts when announcing standards of review. Thus, the interests that normally would have protested did not simply because they did not know their interests were threatened by this apparently benign attempt to restore religious liberty. Indeed, the American Civil Liberties Union testified strongly in favor of RFRA even though the bill was intended by some members of the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion to make it easier for religious individuals and institutions to trump the anti-discrimination laws on which the ACLU has staked its reputation. Other interests simply were not in the loop while RFRA was being enacted. For example, children's advocates concerned about any laws that strengthen the ability of religious individuals to neglect or fail to medically treat a child had no idea that RFRA could impinge on children's rights. Nor were municipalities, who would be forced to bear a heavy litigation cost, alerted to this potential threat. Toward the very end of the legislative debate, the state prisons began to mount opposition. But it was much too late to kill the bill or to get an exemption before it became law.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act lasted almost four years before the Supreme Court struck it down as a law that was beyond Congress's powers in *Boerne v. Flores* (1997). During its existence, the cases brought under the law began to shed light on its vast scope. It was invoked in a case involving whether Sikh school children may carry small knives to school strapped to their legs (in which the court ruled that the school district had to permit such a practice); in a case involving tithing prior to filing for bankruptcy under the federal bankruptcy laws; a case involving safety placards on Amish buggies; many land use cases; and in a wide variety of prisoner cases. As the cases increased, it became increasingly clear that religious conduct is capable of conflicting with almost any law. With the claims by Luciferians, Satanists, and Wiccans in the prisons, it also became clear that religious pluralism is an empirical reality. We have moved far from the largely closed set of Christian sects present when the Constitution was written.

As soon as RFRA was invalidated, the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion, still with a considerable amount of momentum, pledged to try again at the federal level and to enact "mini-RFRAs" in each of the states. Connecticut and Rhode Island already had enacted mini-RFRAs by then. Following *Boerne* they succeeded in Alabama, Arizona, Illinois, Florida, and Texas, though the latter version was a considerably weaker version than the others with exemptions for civil rights, land use, and a presumption of validity for prison regulations. They also proposed federal legislation, the Religious Liberty Protection Act, which would have instituted the same strict scrutiny test RFRA had mandated.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ RLPA instituted the same strict scrutiny test as RFRA had required. The major difference between the two was that RFRA was enacted pursuant to Congress's power under Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment while RLPA invokes the Commerce Clause, the Spending Clause, and Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The surface appeal of RFRA became tarnished over time. The coalition of groups behind it began to splinter as its real policy implications became apparent and more publicly debated. By the end of 1999, the ACLU, child advocates, municipalities, historical preservation groups, prisons, and school boards were actively lobbying against the passage of any version of RFRA or RLPA that would impact their particular interest.

The religious liberty statutes modeled on RFRA are the newest entrant in the ongoing history of legislation on behalf of religious interests, but they are certainly not the only example. Christian Scientists, who do not believe in medical care, have lobbied successfully for exemptions from childhood immunizations and child endangerment laws. At this time, 45 states, including the District of Columbia, permit parents to forego immunization for their children for religious reasons. Parents opposed to medical care have sought to avoid criminal prosecution or civil penalties when a child is permanently disabled or dies as a result of the failure to obtain medical treatment and they have succeeded on this score in 35 states. For example, in 1998, an Oregon faith-healing sect was responsible for the death of three children. The local prosecutor sought to indict members of the sect but could not because Oregon state law exempted from child neglect laws those who failed to obtain medical care for their children because of religious beliefs. Oregon subsequently amended the law, permitting prosecution for the death of a child.

Faith-healing sects also have had significant successes at the federal level. Under recent Medicare regulations that were amended so as not to be so obviously sect-specific, (after the regulations became the subject of a lawsuit and media attention), faith-healing “nurses” who had trained one week to assist those near death received federal Medicare funding. In other words, individuals who do not believe in medical care receive federal funds intended for medical care. Similarly, the most popular HMO bill in the 105th Congress contained a provision that would have permitted faith-healing nurses to receive HMO insurance funds, and to do so without satisfying the rigorous screening requirements attached to any medical provider’s request for payment.

Taxation. Churches also have enjoyed the centuries-old practice of receiving property tax exemptions, a practice that was upheld by the Supreme Court in *Walz v. Tax Commission* (1970). Although straightforward application of the Court’s establishment jurisprudence likely would have invalidated this broad redistribution of wealth, the Court upheld the property tax exemptions because they had been in place since the framing and might therefore have been condoned by the Framers, and because they had not produced an established church in fact. As in most of its constitutional jurisprudence, the Court has been reluctant to overturn practices in existence for periods exceeding several decades. Property tax exemptions are being tested in several ways at this time. Requests for inclusion in the property tax exemption regime are being filed increasingly by groups whose practices are more troubling to the general welfare. For exam-

ple, in 1998, the Ku Klux Klan in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, requested property tax exemption on the grounds that it is a religion. As religions become more diverse and local resources become scarcer, the argument against such exemptions is gaining some ground. In Colorado, there has been some movement toward abolishing the religious property tax exemptions altogether.

Ironically, the increasing activity of religious bodies in the political process has imperiled their tax-exempt status to some degree. To retain federal tax status, the IRS prohibits religions from acting like political action committees. They may inform their parishioners how particular candidates are voting on issues of concern to them but they may not endorse particular candidates—hence the “voter guides” handed out in many churches and synagogues before elections. As the wording and intent of these voter guides inch closer to outright advocacy for particular candidates, some churches are finding that the IRS is challenging their tax exempt status and that their political enemies are only too happy to point the IRS toward such churches. The IRS has not taken kindly to giving tax-exempt status to politically active religious organizations and ruled against the Christian Coalition’s bid for tax exempt status.

The next major church-state issue to become a source of conflict will likely be social service contracts based on the “charitable choice” provision of the 1995 welfare reform act. Under charitable choice, religious entities cannot be excluded from the roster of those who administer public funds. While the approach has been promoted by candidates from both parties, the potential constitutional problems have hardly been evaluated. When religions step into the shoes of the government, the civil rights of those receiving the funds become an issue. In order for the transmission of funds to be constitutional, the government will be required to place limits on how the funds are administered, including limitations on proselytization. Such limits, though, invite free-exercise challenges from the churches. Just as we have seen in the government arts funding context, government funding in any category implicating First Amendment values invites discord and litigation.

In our era, religion is at times an irresistible force in the political process. The increasing political sophistication of religious institutions portends more requests for state aid, exemptions, and special treatment in the near term and thus more litigation. As the Supreme Court’s free exercise doctrine in *Smith* bumps up against its establishment doctrine, we will witness the growth of a new branch in its evolution. Right now, the savvier players in the political process on these issues tend to be the religions. As their requests impinge upon more laws that are dear to certain elements of the public, such as the anti-discrimination laws, we can expect that legislatures, nonsectarian interest groups, and citizens will become more likely to scrutinize religion’s requests with care, assuming the press covers such stories. With the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the pendulum of religion’s power swung to its topmost posi-

tion. The history of religion and the law in the United States provide strong evidence that the pendulum will swing back, and then forth again.

The Supreme Court has premised its religion-clause jurisprudence on this simple empirical presupposition: All entities in the society, including church and state, will exploit their power if given the opportunity. The plasticity of the exercise of power has led the Court to search for the pragmatic balance of power between church and state in its religion-clause jurisprudence.

History teaches that one should never assume in any case involving religion that either side—church or state—necessarily wears the white hat. It may take a great deal of digging to determine who is wearing it. Indeed, sometimes both sides are; sometimes neither side is. A recent editorial in the *Rocky Mountain News* argued that pending legislation that would immunize churches from the fiduciary duty laws (and therefore exempt them from clergy malpractice suits) was a special interest bill being blocked by the Colorado Trial Lawyers Association because they wanted to enrich their pocketbooks. The editorial's easy conclusion was that the bill should be passed.⁴⁷ What the editorial board apparently did not know (or at least did not mention) was that the bill was being generated not so much by churches (who pay a small premium each year in clergy malpractice insurance and therefore are not significantly burdened by the fiduciary duty laws), but rather by the insurance industry that must pay the high verdicts reached in such cases. Reasonable people can line up on either side of this bill, but the reporting on it made it impossible for readers to know what the real issues were.

In sum, oversimplification of any issue involving religion is always a danger. One last anecdote: After I delivered a speech at the Chautauqua Institute last summer on liberty and the Constitution, a woman stood up and told the following story, with the apparent point that it is impossible for religion to win against zoning boards. Her struggling church is in New York City. In order to survive, the church members sold their building to a developer who promised them permanent space in the building. When the developer asked the city's zoning board for a variance on various zoning requirements, he claimed that it was needed for religious reasons. With the fear that their small group would not survive without the developer's payment, the church also argued to the zoning board that the variances were necessary for religious purposes. The woman, in her question, decried the hard-heartedness of the zoning board, which disapproved the variances. What were the variances for? The developer wanted to build many stories higher than the air rights would permit and therefore would have blocked the views of many residents behind the building. How much space was the small religious group going to need? A portion of the first floor.

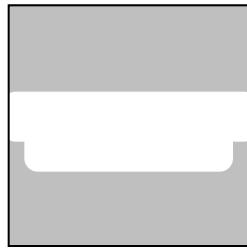
⁴⁷ February 8, 1999.

The moral? Even religion is to be distrusted. The Framers built the constitutional structure on a foundation of distrust, distrust of all those who hold and wield power. They were not nihilists, though, but rather hoped that the constitutional structure, with its checks and balances, would deter abuses of power. Thus, power was to be channeled toward the interest of the country.

Their calculations included religion. Religion could be a constructive force, but it was also to be distrusted because it was capable of abusing its significant power. Reporters covering religion would do well to treat it as the complex phenomenon the Framers understood.

The Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life was established at Trinity College in 1996 to advance knowledge and understanding of the varied roles that religious movements, institutions, and ideas play in the contemporary world; to explore challenges posed by religious pluralism and tensions between religious and secular values; and to examine the influence of religion on politics, culture, family life, gender roles, and other issues in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

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