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Religion and Public Policy: An Introduction[1]

One way of approaching the following essays is to pause here at the beginning and consider the peculiarity of the conversation we will be overhearing. In this volume we will be listening to a group of scholars who are Catholic, Episcopal, mainline Protestant, evangelical, and secularist in their varied backgrounds. They are considering the place of religion in public policymaking. The peculiarity arises if we think about American public life historically. For one thing, we are listening to people who most likely would not have been inclined to interact with each other at the outset of the twentieth century. More than that, they are talking about something that hardly anyone a hundred years ago would have thought even needs discussing.

The subject under discussion is the relationship between religion on the one hand—in both organized and unorganized forms—and public choices made through government on the other. Put bluntly, what should concerns about God have to do with the way Americans govern themselves? To locate this conversation historically, we might imagine three snapshots, sketchy as they must be.

> At the beginning of the 20th century, the widespread presumption was that God's claims had everything to do with the way Americans governed themselves. When the oldest of today's living Americans were born, which is to say in the days of Bryan, McKinley and Teddy Roosevelt, the "public-ness" of religion was taken for granted in a national political culture dominated by Protestants. It was widely assumed that America was a Christian nation and should behave itself accordingly. Of course, exactly what that meant in practice

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> aroused vigorous argument when it came to issues like alcohol control, labor legislation, child welfare, foreign colonization and the like. Then too, the nation was in the midst of a tumultuous in-migration of people who were outside the Protestant, Anglo-Saxon mainstream. (In one five-year period at the turn of the century, America received as many immigrants as in all the years from 1930 to 1960 combined.) Nevertheless, it was essentially in a self-confident Protestant party system and moralistic political culture the newcomers had to find their place. (The manager of the New York Yankees could be, and was, arrested for breaking the law and playing baseball on the Sunday Sabbath.) Likewise, despite dissents from a small number of radical non-believers, leading public thinkers of the day seemed able to reconcile a "liberal" version of Christianity with the new knowledge being produced by Darwinian science, economics, sociology, history and Bible criticism. It would be the last time that the nation's traditional pastor-theologians played an extensive role in American intellectual history.[2]

We fast-forward now to the middle of the twentieth century, when the situation was more complex and changing rapidly.

> The semi-official Protestant establishment of fifty years earlier was now well on its way to breaking up, and so too were strictures on Catholics and Jews in the public arena. Indeed any variant of what was now being labeled as the Judeo-Christian tradition served as a civil religion in America's Cold War struggle against godless Communism. Patriotic piety found expression as Congress enacted the National Day of Prayer in 1952, added "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, and adopted "In God Trust" as the country's official motto in 1956. However, at the same time, the Supreme Court had just begun applying the Constitution's First Amendment protections of religious liberty to state governments. Bans on state-mandated prayer and Bible reading in public schools would soon follow. Outside government, intellectual leadership had passed to a mushrooming system of secular higher education, which was in turn one aspect of the larger "secularization" process that social scientists identified with modernization. Meanwhile, beneath the placid surface of mainstream religion, the institutional forms and doctrines of traditional Christianity came under increased criticism from Christians themselves. By the Sixties the critiques of American Christendom seemed to be exploding in all directions—a civil rights movement

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> anchored in black churches, the Vatican II Council's reforms overturning centuries of tradition in the Catholic Church, the "God is dead" movement among radical Protestant clerics and theologians, a public reemergence of evangelical fundamentalists from their own subculture of Bible schools, not to mention hippie "Jesus freaks" and a wide assortment of New Age spiritual experimenters.

None of this set in motion a simple separation between religion and public policymaking for the latter half of the twentieth century. Let us now jump to the scene over another fifty years.

> Legally speaking, by the century's end court decisions had made the so-called wall of separation between church and state far stronger than ever before, and not a Protestant device erected against Catholics and Mormons as it had tended to be at the beginning of the century. Even the mottos of religious patriotism seemed on shaky ground (Ohio's state motto adopted in 1959—"with God all things are possible"—was overturned in federal court in 2000). But at the same time, between the late 1960s and 1990s Americans of almost all religious and non-religious persuasions became more accepting of religious groups' involvement in the political process.[3] Contrary to theories of modernization advanced by social scientists fifty years earlier, the 20th century ended with social observers talking about failures of secularization and a reemergence of "de-privatizated" religions into the public forum.[4] Typically, these political activists represented conservative, fundamentalist groups that were supposed to have disappeared with the steam engine. By contrast, in the intellectual culture in American institutions of higher learning, what had been mere embarrassment at mid-century had often become hostility to Christianity by century's end.[5] At yet another level, the meaning of religious belief itself was changing in the larger culture. After mid-century, many if not most Americans found that the search for "spirituality" was more important than traditional religious doctrines, specific creeds or church denominations.[6] To claim that there were absolute moral truths (a view rejected by three out of four American adults in the 1990s) or that one religious faith was superior to another seemed widely regarded as a form of spiritual racism. Nonetheless, this tolerant spiritual questing was occurring in a technological society that demanded public policy choices with evermore far-reaching consequences for the meaning of human life.

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All of this hints at a wonderfully rich story about religion and democracy in modern America. Unfortunately, it is a story that tends to be suppressed in public school textbooks that were purged of "God-talk" after the 1960s—itself a revealing development. To appreciate what the following essays have to say, it is important to recognize the boundaries we are drawing around the subject matter in this volume.

An Overview

Our aim in the following pages is to step back and consider the transactions between religion and public policy in the century just ended. The main intent is to discuss how the influence of religion has been, and ought to be, accommodated in the formulation and carrying out of public policy. This is a large subject, but it is not all of public life or all of American religion. Christianity is certainly not the only religion worthy of notice in America. It is the religion we focus on here because Christianity is the one most directly connected with important policy issues of the century just ended.

Likewise, there are specific public issues—abortion, euthanasia, and genetic engineering are obvious examples—where people's religious beliefs play an especially dramatic role in politics. These particular debates are left in the background of this volume. We do this so that the following essays can focus on broader understandings of secularism and religious conservatism in the political arena and on larger domains of public policy commitment such as education and social welfare.

Readers may also be surprised to find that this volume contains no chapter devoted to changing legal approaches to the constitutional separation of church and state. Apart from space limitations, this apparent gap is accounted for by our focus on public policy as such. In the day-to-day experiences of policymaking, constitutional issues enter sideways so to speak, not as a self-contained sphere of legal doctrine. Hence, legal norms regarding separation of church and state are a presence throughout different essays in this work, but they are not a self-contained topic. The same applies to the obviously important subject of protecting minority groups' religious liberty under the First Amendment.

This comment about church/state relations suggests a schema that may be helpful in thinking about the essays to follow. The major interactions between religion and public policy seem to occur at three different levels.[7]

The first is *institutional.* Here attention focuses on the way organized structures of religion and government impinge on each other and together

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on society. It is a perspective that comes most naturally to Americans because it is genetically encoded, so to speak, with their nation's founding understanding of itself. The bland phrase "separation of church and state" conceals what was the most historically unique and audacious thing about America's experiment in self-government—the commitment to a free exercise of religion.[8] It is on this institutional level, with national and then state government, that one encounters the contests over government sponsorship of religious organizations and disputed infringements on groups claiming the unfettered exercise of religious liberties. Less obviously, it is also where one finds religious and public agencies grinding against each other in the conduct of such things as educational and welfare policies.

The second area of interconnectedness between religion and public policy can be termed *behavioral.* By this, one means nothing grander than the idea that through religious attachments people are moved to act in public ways (e.g., voting, community organizing, and other political activities). It is important to notice that there is a direct, though paradoxical, link between these first and second dimensions. The hands-off distancing between religious and government institutions has meant that in America religion could be a free-forming and immensely rich resource for the nation's politics. The astute observer Alexis de Tocqueville concluded that his American informants were correct—the main reason religion held great sway over their country was the separation of church and state: "by diminishing the apparent power of religion one increased its real strength."[9] Thus since Tocqueville's visit in 1831, Americans in religious association have created and sustained movements promoting the abolition of slavery, women's rights, prison and asylum reform, child welfare and worker protection, mothers pensions, liquor regulation, racial desegregation, and civil rights legislation. People moved to action through religious affiliations have also been an important resource in more routine party politics and elections.

The third dimension of connections between religion and public policy is more difficult to put into words. But one senses, almost instinctively, that something very important is still missing if we simply give an account of organized institutions and politically relevant behaviors. Lacking a better term, we might call this third sphere *philosophical.* Here one is trying to capture the intersections of religion and policymaking that involve ideas and modes of thought bearing on the fundamental ordering of a society's public life. It is the arena people are operating in when they speak about culture wars or the nation's need for a moral vision. It is the substructure of ideas on the basis of which some people cringe and others rejoice when a presidential candidate talks about his personal relationship to Jesus Christ.

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Religion is not only a source of moral principles (as well as masks for hypocrisy) in public debate. It is also the ground of competing public philosophies for the nation, which can include the religious injunction to keep explicit religion out of politics.

The philosophical level is not about abstract thought experiments but ties back into the first two dimensions. Consider that aspect of public philosophy contending for separations of church and state. In keeping the new national government out of religious matters, the formal Constitution was constructed, as some have described it, as a "godless" document.[10] This is not because religion was unimportant to the society but because it was too important. As a matter of prudent political predictions—in the behavioral dimension noted above—the Founders understood why the Constitution had best keep essentially silent on matters of religion and God. In general, the dangers of political division based on religion were fresh in historic memories of Europe's religious wars. More particularly, the fragile coalition behind the proposed Constitution would be endangered by any statements about religion and devotion to God that might compete with the abundant state and local government dealings on the subject.

Yet, in relating calculations of political behavior and institutional design, the Founders were also drawing on a deeper set of understandings already present in society. These were ideas about individual conscience identified with Protestantism, and they were refined and elevated during decades-long encounters among concrete communities of religious believers and dissenters in the American colonies. Thus behind the separating of church and state loomed an emerging cultural commitment to the free exercise of religion. This state-limiting, free exercise norm was mainly a religious achievement pursued in search of genuine religiosity. Generally speaking, its champions were not secular philosophers but religious people who were convinced that religion could never be authentic if it was directly or indirectly coerced through government.[11]

The point, then, is that institutional, behavioral, and philosophical categories are three interrelated, not separate, perspectives important to the subject matter of this volume. The threefold connections between religion and public policy find expression in every one of the following essays, although the emphasis differs as the essays proceed from one subject to the next.

Wilfred McClay deals with secularist modes of thought that came to dominate so much of twentieth-century American policy and politics. There are, he argues, two concepts of secularism, each of which profoundly but differently affects what is at stake for our institutions and for the practical

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politics of our cultural conflicts. The following pair of essays deal with the two major Christian presences in American public life, Protestant and Catholic. Darryl Hart examines the religious right in politics, doing so in the larger context of Protestantism's troubled engagement with modern political society. The contrast between McClay's positive and negative secularism now finds its religious parallel in Hart's historical distinction between evangelical and liturgical Protestantism. When we move to Father John Coleman's essay, the reader may discern a deepening paradox. What McClay and Hart have to commend, respectively, in negative secularism and liturgical Protestantism seems to take concrete form as Father Coleman analyzes the ideas, organization, and methods of American Catholicism and its engagement in public policy discussions.

Father Coleman's discussion of Catholic welfare programs leads the volume into another pair of essays, this time concerned with two specific policy domains. If space allowed (and some readers may be glad it does not), one could show that welfare, or "charity" as it would have been known earlier, and education were the two central issues in changing church and state roles over the past five hundred years of modern "secularization." Here we confine ourselves to twentieth-century American experience. Stanley Carlson-Thies presents an overall account of public welfare policy, culminating with the insertion of organized religion into the government welfare system and the reversal of six decades of national policy developments. Charles Glenn then takes us in the seemingly reverse direction of "positive secularism" with his examination of America's religion-free public school policies. Here one finds certain modes of thought and political behavior interacting to yield an institutional framework that casts religion as its enemy. The final piece in this volume brackets McClay's more philosophical take-off essay with a focus on the practical politics of Americans' religious involvements. James Reichley points not only to a party divergence of traditionalists and modernists, paradoxically enough amid convergence on some policy issues, but also to the continuing relevance of religion's moral voice in our public life.

This, then, is a birds'-eye view of the following six essays. But it is scarcely a motivating rationale for plowing through the pages ahead. The easiest thing for the reader to do would be to find some intellectual shortcut to escape the complexities of this subject. One might cling to a simplistic formula that says religion and public policy should not mix. Alternatively, one could escape by interpreting the subject as nothing more than a history of self-interested struggles for political power. The problem is that these intellectual shortcuts are untrue to the subject and inadequate for the challenge of our times.

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The Inescapable Coupling

Whether we like it or not, the connections between religion and public policy choices are profound and unavoidable. Government policy and religious matters are not the same thing, but neither are they isolated from each other. The two are distinct but not separate.

The two domains intertwine because both claim to give authoritative answers to important questions about how people should live. Both are concerned with the pursuit of values in an obligational way. To put it another way, both religion and public policies deal in "oughts" and do so in terms of commands rather than idle suggestions or passing speculations.

Obviously, religion tells people how they should live. It can be less obvious that public policy also presents directives for living out some answers and not others. It does so because policy represents certain choices for society and those choices are backed up by the coercive power of government. Like it or not, modern government policy is invariably in the business of mandating, promoting, discouraging, or prohibiting some ways of life and not others. The point, then, is this. In a very deep, substantive way, the City of God and the City of Man are inescapably engaged in transactions with each other.[12] Our book is about the changing terms and meaning of that engagement in twentieth-century America.

Nevertheless, it is also true to say that religion and policy are not the same thing. Religion points toward matters of ultimate meaning understood as humans stand in relation to the sacred and supernatural. Concerned with what is timeless, unchanging, and holy, religion is about the Absolute, or it is about nothing. By contrast, the courses of action pursued by government—its policies—are societal engagements with the here and now. Its meanings are proximate. At least in democratic (as opposed to totalitarian) government, policymaking acknowledges itself to be contingent, potentially erroneous, and changeable.

But exactly at this point we risk falling into another trap of simplistic, stereotyped thinking about our subject. Are religious people therefore to be seen as the ones who make absolutist pronouncements and the irreligious mind as the only one capable of tolerance? Is serious religion necessarily intolerant and are godless people the ones who can be counted on to engage the diverse public audience with persuasion rather than with asserting dogma? Not at all. This way of parsing the subject obscures too much of the spiritual possibilities in religion as well as the inhumane

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possibilities in secularism. It denies the possibility of a religious faith that, sensing the eternal and transcendent, renders relative and contingent all human institutions and claims to truth—including dogmatic religiousness as a form of idolatry.[13] Likewise, if there can be contingent, humbling dimensions to lived religion, there can also be absolutist assumptions and dogmatically imposed faith surrounding supposedly contingent, secular policies. Religion and policy mark a continuous flashpoint in public life because the two touch precisely along that horizon where the great thing needful is to keep relative things relative and absolutes absolute.[14]

If nothing else, these introductory comments should raise warning flags: thinking about religion and public policy requires thinking in complex rather than simplistic ways. Doing so means harkening to what might be taken to be the first commandment of all religions—to "pay attention," to look past the surface of things and not assume that what meets the eye is all that is going on.

A Timely Retrospective

Brute facts are looming that make it particularly worthwhile just now to pause and take stock of recent history regarding religion and public policy. The first fact is the ever-expanding role of national policy in Americans' lives. During the course of the twentieth century, struggles over federal policy increasingly served to define America's political and cultural order.[15] In other words, conceptions of who we are as a people became increasingly translated into arguments about what Washington should do, or stop doing. Abortion is the obvious example, but to see the point one need only to consider our thinking about race, the role of women, crime, free speech, economic security in old age, how our children are to be educated, or people's relation to the natural environment, to mention just a few. Reflecting this trend, academics and then the public after the 1950s began to make unprecedented use of the term "policy" as a category for understanding American political life. However, the century as a whole germinated, nourished, and spread the modern syndrome of "policy-mindedness"—an addiction to the idea that everything preying on the public mind requires government to do or stop doing something. In this situation, almost any human activity can be seen as charged with policy relevance, from the design of toilets to sexual innuendo in the workplace (filigrees of environmental policy and civil rights policy, respectively). Like it or not, our cultural discussions and decisions are now policy-embedded.

Second, it is good to take stock now because technological advances

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have brought our nation to the point where profoundly important public choices are becoming inescapable. Of course, scientific knowledge has been accumulating over many centuries of human investigation of the natural world. However, it is particularly in the latter years of the twentieth century that much of modern society's earlier investment in basic research accumulated into technological applications able to affect human life on a massive scale. For example, in 1827 the existence of the human egg was first discovered and only in the middle of the twentieth century did the DNA structure of life become know. Since then, the momentous applications of this accumulated knowledge have come in a crashing rush. By 1978 the first "test tube" (in-vitro fertilized) human baby was born. By the 1990s, the first mammals had been cloned, human manipulation of "designer genes" had begun, and the first financial markets for human egg donors had developed. Other scientific advances are requiring portentous decisions about artificial intelligence and the reconstitution of the human brain, the meaning and prolongation of death, organ regeneration and human manipulation of the structures of life, the reconstruction of matter at the atomic level of nanotechnology, to mention only a few issues

Likewise, scaling up in the other direction to global life, it is only since the mid-twentieth century that the growing technological impact of modern society on the environment has become known. At the end of the 1950s, Rachel Carson offered the first dramatic account of man's disastrous impact on life and the earth.[16] Within eight years, human beings saw the first pictures from space of their common earth home. The point is not simply that issues such as ozone depletion, species extinction, global warming, and the like have never been thought about before our own times. The point is that these are examples of portentous matters that people have never before had to deal with as objects of collective decision-making—which is to say, as matters of public policy. Inescapably, the extent to which ethics leads or lags behind technology is now measured in the particular policy decisions produced by our political system. Those most knowledgeable about twenty-first-century science and technology are often the ones most worried. In accepting the Templeton Prize for the year 2000, the distinguished scientist Freeman Dyson observed that science and religion must come together to make decisions about humanity's fate. Likewise in offering a melancholic reflection on the meaning of his own work, Bill Joy, the founder and chief scientist of Sun Microsystems, describes how the transformative power of new technology forces us "to confront the issue of what we are to become. . . . Science is providing possibilities but no useful limits."[17] If all this is so, there is no escaping a future where religious faith intertwines with the politics of policymaking.

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Here is a powerful case for the timeliness of this volume's topic. Modern technological civilization is the first with such outward reach, bringing all societies within a common destiny; and it is also the first with such penetrating inwardness, putting the very structures of life and matter into human hands. This is more than information overload. Driven by the apparently unstoppable momentum of scientific and technological know-how, it is a specter of policy choices drenched in religious and cultural implications as to what man is and how he should live. One might say many things about this technology trap. That it is going to go away is not one of those things.

Finally, in a time of growing cultural diversity, it is especially important to pause and search for common understandings of what has been happening to us. Without some minimally shared memory, it is difficult even to have an "us." On the one hand, twentieth-century America has experienced declining geographic and class differences. The churning of advertising and consumption in a single mass market has homogenized material life throughout the fifty states.[18] On the other hand, however, with uniformity in this dimension has come greater acceptance of variation in the realm of cultural meanings and values. Slogans such as "identity politics," "culture wars," "inclusiveness," and "political correctness" have become common in recent decades. Their widespread use reflects how much affirmations of diversity have supplanted earlier assumptions about a cultural core. "Multiculturalism" is simply the way of labeling a host of changes in demographics, group self-consciousness, and educational philosophy. With Muslims outnumbering Presbyterians in today's America, multiculturalism is more than faddish academic terminology. America is becoming a more truly multireligion, post-Christian society.[19]

Thus while we write in the year 2000, beyond the arbitrariness of turnover in a century's calendar there are three substantive reasons why now is a good time for citizens to take stock of interrelations between religion and public policy. Begin with a vast political society that increasingly defines itself by self-consciously making collective decisions about what to do and not do. Add a technological imperative that expands this society's policy agenda to raise ever more profound questions—the nature of life, brains, reproduction, death, and the sustainability of humankind's earthly existence. Together, policy-mindedness and the technology trap would be challenge enough, but to these we must add the third feature: an increasingly fragmented sense of cultural identities among the self-governing people who are called upon to oversee those decisions. These three observations imply that the interaction of religion and public policy will be a growing challenge in the years ahead.

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In this light, we have tried to produce benchmark essays that any citizen can consult to gain a fair and usable idea of the twentieth century's "big picture" concerning American religion and public policy. More particularly, we hope the results will be broadly educational for the coming generation of young believers and nonbelievers that will have to deal with the implications of this history in the next century.

The Wages of Entanglement

Many people consider it disturbing, if not downright dangerous, to invoke religious commitments in matters of public policy. There are good reasons to think this way. Since religion makes claims about ultimate truth, compromise can be not only difficult; it may be interpreted as sinning against God. Yet compromise is what makes peaceful politics possible. Thus mixing religion and policymaking opens pathways to intolerance, persecution, and bloody-mindedness in the body politic. The mixture stirs the modern mind's vague but potent memories of Crusades, Inquisitions, and religious wars. It was to this dominant understanding of religion that John Lennon could appeal in his popular song "Imagine" describing an ideal future: "Imagine there's no countries / It isn't hard to do / Nothing to kill or die for / No religion too / Imagine all the people / living life in peace."

People are probably less likely to recognize the opposite danger that policy engagement poses for religious persons. As opposed to being intolerant of error, engagement can encourage political expediency, duplicity, and hypocrisy (not to mention a focus on the allurements of fund-raising).[20] Even should religious folk avoid these snares, such high-minded people are easily exploitable. Writing about the fall of the Roman Empire, Edward Gibbons observed that for philosophers all religions are false and for common people they are all true. But, he said, for politicians all religions are useful. In other words, mixing religion and policy is likely to call forth not only worldly knaves and naïve saints but also the worst of cross-breeds—saintly-appearing knaves. A subtler and frequently overlooked danger for the religious outlook is that policy engagement often reveals unanswerable puzzles and contradictions among "God's people." This in turn may not only shake the faith of believers. It is also likely to deepen doubts among religious skeptics and supply abundant ammunition to those who are actively hostile to all religion.

Growing as they do out of centuries of hard experience, these first two points are far from groundless worries. Nevertheless, there are also reasons to welcome the mixture of religion and public policy. There can be a

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benefit to religion itself because engagement with policy concerns gives concrete meaning to otherwise abstract commitments. Apart perhaps from passing mystic encounters, it seems that to be in touch with the universal one has to be connected to the concrete, or as it was put more succinctly, faith without works is dead. Seeking to influence the policies that will guide their society is an important way people of religious faith can live out their beliefs.

There are also gains for society in acknowledging and positively valuing the mixture of religion in public policy debates. For one thing, with modern policies touching ever more profound issues of life, there is a dangerous narrow-mindedness in dismissing religious perspectives as if policymakers had finally settled the great questions of human existence. Without religion mixed into the policy conversation, society runs the risk of falling for false claims of moral "neutralism"—the too-easy reassurance that policy choices depend merely on technical knowledge or popular convenience. Neutralism is itself based on some fundamental assumptions, beliefs, and leaps of faith. Having to confront bodies of overtly religious people whose fundamental assumptions are out in public can do much to bring also the hidden secular assumptions of policymakers to light.

However, there is more at stake than a tolerant open forum and better public-debate process. Religion adds something vitally important to the content of what is being said. It asserts that there is a transcendent purpose that gives meaning to who human beings are and what they do. The religious voice insists that God-inspired standards be taken seriously in the way a society governs itself, that questions of right and wrong, better or worse, are more than matters of passing opinion. The point of view here goes beyond the idea that religion is a method of social control that undergirds moral behavior and thus prevents liberty from descending into license. There is more to the historic record than people killing each other in the name of their gods. Religion can also have overarching value for humaneness in modern society. It is a religious outlook that contends for the immortal grandeur of man as a God-imaged creation raised above the natural world. It does so not as poetic metaphor but as a conviction about the essence of man's being. On the other hand, if human beings live no more meaningfully and die as conclusively as animals, they are unlikely to possess any qualitative, intrinsic difference in value from animals. That is not a happy thought when it comes to life-and-death issues of modern public policy.

Thus religion "rocks the boat," so to speak, in public debate, but it seems far healthier to have such trouble in a developed democracy than not to have it. Religion contends that action in history is meaningful

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beyond any passing material concerns. If traditional religion is absent from the public arena, secular religions are likely to be invoked to satisfy man's quest for meaning. We should recall that for much of the twentieth century antidemocratic forces did very well using social idealism to appeal to people's hope for a meaningful life. It was an atheistic faith in man as creator of his own grandeur that lay at the heart of Communism, fascism, and all the horrors they unleashed for the twentieth century. And it was adherents of traditional religions—a Martin Niemoller, C. S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Buber—who often warned most clearly of the tragedy to come from attempting to build man's own version of the New Jerusalem on earth. Such warning voices may be even more valuable in the high-tech world of the twenty-first century.

If religion is to have a place in public life, the question naturally arises of how to accommodate it. This brings us to concepts such as secularism and public religion.

From Secularization to Public Religion

In contemporary discussions of religion and public affairs, the master concept has been the idea of secularization. This volume will have much to say about secularization, but for the moment it might help to offer a brief background.

The term itself derives from the Latin word *saeculum,* meaning "world" or "age." In a very general way, the idea of the secular directs our attention to the place and time of this world. In that sense, it presupposes a demarcation between the sacred and profane. Similarly, secularization is the corresponding process of attending more to what is worldly, as opposed to things religious and beyond time. For example, in the Catholic Church, brothers, sisters, and priests who take the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and live in communities are called "religious." However, men ordained as diocesan priests, who do not take the vow of poverty or live in communities, work daily with the people of their parishes and are called "secular" priests. In calling the latter secular, the Catholic Church emphasizes their involvement in the day-to-day lives of ordinary people, the laity. When religious or diocesan priests leave the priesthood, they undergo "laicization." Another, more modern meaning of "secular" emerged at the time of the Protestant Reformation, when not only Catholic assets but also traditional Church functions (charity, almshouses, education, and so on) were increasingly taken over by the political state.

This history provided the materials out of which the young social sci-

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ences of the latter nineteenth century developed their theories of secularization that dominated much of twentieth-century thinking. In this new scientific view of society, human activity should be analyzed as historical phenomena, rooted in place and time, one thing unfolding out of another. Religion itself was just another human activity that should be understood historically. In other words, religion was an evolutionary social function moving from more primitive to higher forms. In this way, the idea of secularization became very tightly bound up with understandings of modernization and its outgrowing of religion.

As the twentieth century dawned, the "secularization" that religious traditionalists considered an abrupt wrong turn, leading modernists saw as a benign and progressive evolution of belief systems. Just as secular political organizations replaced the welfare, educational, and other social functions of religious institutions, so science and enlightened humanitarianism would provide the new creed that many expected to displace supernaturalist religion. As society modernized, religion would be increasingly confined to private zones of personal belief, while policymaking would deal with worldly affairs in a scientific manner neutral and indifferent to religious faith. Religion could rest comfortably in the modern state and do its one-on-one soul work. Public life could proceed peacefully, safeguarded from passionate clashes over religious truth.

All of this, in very crude terms, is what became known as the secularization thesis. To be modern meant to replace childish fables of miracles with scientific knowledge of the world. It meant to disabuse the mind of religious superstitions and recognize the psychological needs that prompt mankind to create religious commitments in the first place. Modern man might still call things sacred, but it was his or her private call. In public life the spell of enchantment was now seen to be broken, or soon would be.

However, something happened on the way to privatizing God. Speaking very schematically—and merely by way of introducing this volume's subject—the twentieth century appears to have witnessed a two-phase movement. For about the first two-thirds of the century, secularization seemed to predominate. In the last third of the century, the picture changed considerably. Religion refused to stay in the private ghetto to which modernity had assigned it. From the Islamic revolution in Iran, to the Catholic Church in communist Eastern Europe, to the religious right in the United States, religion reengaged with political history. The sociologist José Casanova has surveyed this resurgence of "public religion" and observes that "during the entire decade of the 1980s it was hard to find any serious political conflict anywhere in the world that did not show behind it the not-so-

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hidden hand of religion. . . . we are witnessing the 'deprivatization' of religion in the modern world."[21] Moreover, this "going public" of religion was not an expression of new religious movements or quasi-religions of modern humanism. Rather, it was reentry into the political arena of precisely those traditional religions that secular modernity was supposed to have made obsolete.

The focus of this book is on the United States. The three snapshots with which I began portray a century when federal government policies were becoming more prominent in people's lives and the multifaceted secularization process seemed to be taking hold in public affairs. By midcentury, a kind of civil-religious nationalism seemed to hold sway in the public sphere, while private faiths of mainstream Protestants, Catholics, and Jews expressed three variants of Americanism. Along with this was developing a growing body of court-made law that insisted on sharper separations between church and state.

Probably it is no coincidence that just as federal policy activism increased and the Supreme Court was working through decisions requiring strict "neutrality' of government toward religion in the 1960s and 1970s, the first stirrings of an unexpected religious engagement with the public culture began to be felt. It is easy now to forget that the earliest of these came from the "religious left" in criticizing materialist secular culture. Soon the mix included the Catholic bishops, the Christian Coalition, and the "religious right." In ways we may never understand, the turbulent era of the Sixties awakened religious and semireligious commitments whose crosscurrents have carried through to our own time of writing. Like the people themselves, many policy choices seem to be both secular and religious.[22] In any case, by century's end there could be no doubt that religion was a legitimately "public" as well as a private activity.

Coming Attractions

In examining twentieth-century interactions of religion and public policy, the following essays seek to integrate accounts of both theory and practice. We have tried to avoid the academic inclination to force the history of ideas and events into two separate compartments. Too often the result is intelligence divided against itself. On one side, the academic temptation is to weave elaborate but abstract interpretative theories that are out of touch with concrete social realities. If they were honest, many academics could not recognize their own lives in their theories. On the other side, practical-minded realists are tempted to rummage through the politics of

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policymaking—who gets what, when, how—to show yet again that self-interest rules, as if in such struggles no larger meanings for individuals and society were at stake. The problem here is that self-interests are not self-defining.

Probably the most helpful way to think about the subject matter of this volume lies in the response given by English philosopher Alfred North Whitehead to a student who asked which was more important: ideas or events? Neither, was Whitehead's answer. What matters most are ideas about events. The following essays teach that these idea-event linkages are the work not simply of intellectual theorists but of a people's historical existence together. The core of history is not a series of naked events but a sequence of essential attitudes toward events, attitudes that are themselves a product of collective memory handed down from one generation to the next.[23] Without this, a people cease to be a people.

The authors here do not shrink from presenting their own ideas about the meaning of events and recommending future choices. They do so, however, after giving a great deal of attention to how we got to where we are. Why should a person care about this history? That is any reader's honest question. One can do no better than invoke the thinking of an American who seemed to embody an almost mystic union of religious and political sensibilities. As the great national bloodletting that was to come gathered momentum, Abraham Lincoln in 1858 sought for the needed perspective: "If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do and how to do it."[24]

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Notes

1. I wish to thank Father James Heft for his especially helpful comments on a first draft of this introduction.

2. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, 1972), 776.

3. Andrew Kohut et al., *The Diminishing Divide: Religion's Changing Role in American Politics* (Washington, D.C., 2000).

4. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, 1994); early findings from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' five-volume publication on worldwide fundamentalism appear in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *The Glory and the Power: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World* (Boston, 1992).

5. George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York, 1994).

6. Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998); David G. Myers, *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty* (New Haven, 2000).

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7. The schema is adapted from Mark Noll's introduction in Mark A. Noll, ed., *Religion and American Politics* (New York, 1990)

8. John T. Noonan Jr., *The Lustre of Our Country: The American Experience of Religious Freedom* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998).

9. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* ed. J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner (New York, 1966), 273.

10. Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution* (New York, 1996). Explanations for the Constitution's godless language are examined historically by John F. Wilson, "Religion, Government, and Power in the New American Nation," in Noll, *Religion and American Politics,* 77–91; and Daniel L. Dreisbach, "In Search of a Christian Commonwealth," *Baylor Law Review* 48:4 (Fall 1996): 927–1000.

11. See Noonan, *The Lustre of Our Country,* passim.

12. Deeper interpretations of the historical transformation in these transactions cannot be dealt with here. A provocative account is Marcel Gauchet's *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (Princeton, 1997). For a valuable counterpoint, see Charles Taylor's foreword to this volume as well as his *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989) and *A Catholic Modernity?* Marianist Award Lecture (Dayton, Ohio, 1996).

13. See Glenn Tinder, *Tolerance and Community* (Columbia, Mo., 1995), chap. 3.

14. This is exactly the viewpoint Richard Niebuhr identified behind the Founders commitment to religious freedom. See his 1939 lecture "The Limitation of Power and Religious Liberty," reproduced in Harvard Divinity School, *Religion & Values in Public Life* 3:2 (Winter 1995).

15. For an important argument about the way federal government growth helped catalyze religious conflicts, see Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton, 1988).

16. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston, 1962), which first appeared as a series of articles in *The New Yorker.*

17."Why the Future Doesn't Need Us," *Wired* Magazine, April 2000.

18. Frank Levy, *The New Dollars and Dreams* (New York, 1998).

19. Richard E. Wentz, *The Culture of Religious Pluralism* (Boulder, 1997).

20. For a recent recognition of this danger from two leaders of America's Religious Right, see Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, *Blinded by Might* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1999).

21. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World,* 3 and 5. The about-face in secularization theories is well illustrated in Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, D.C., 1999).

22. As one leading scholar of religion put it, ours is a "religio-secular, operative-passional, sacro-secular life and society." Martin E. Marty, "The Sacred and Secular in American History," in M. L. Bradbury and James B. Gilbert, eds., *Transforming Faith* (New York, 1989), 1, 8.

23. Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work: The Middle Years 1923–1945* (New York, 1983), vol. 2, 137.

24. Acceptance speech before the Republican Party state convention, Springfield, Illinois, 16 June 1858.

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