A. JAMES REICHLEY

Faith in Politics

In the closing years of the twentieth century, religion became a paramount concern for practitioners and analysts of American politics. During the campaign for the crucial 2000 election, probably shaping the balance of power in national politics for years to come, presidential candidates and party leaders made religion a central factor in their strategies.[1]

Some commentators worry that the rising political salience of religion may create dangerous divisions in American society, as has often occurred in such places as Northern Ireland, the Balkans, the Middle East, and India. Some warn of threats to constitutional separation between church and state.[2]

Throughout most of American history, however, religion has played a potent, though varying, role in political life. Protestant clergy ardently supported the Revolution, and religious bodies enlisted on both sides in the struggle over abolition of slavery that led to the Civil War. Religious groups played major parts in drives for women's suffrage and prohibition of alcohol early in the twentieth century and provided vital support for passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s. Catholicism was an issue with the presidential candidacies of Al Smith in 1928 and John Kennedy in 1960. The massive shift of white evangelicals from the Democratic to the Republican side in the 1980s deeply influenced the direction of national politics.

Whether mixing religion with politics in the current state of our culturally pluralist society is wise—and if so, to what extent and how—are questions that cannot fully be settled through knowledge of the past. But getting the historical record straight will be useful in considering these currently contentious issues.

In this chapter, I will trace the role of religion in American politics during the twentieth century and the decades leading up to it, particularly with

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regard to party and ideological alignments. In the final two sections, I will examine the current and likely future effects of religious faith on political behavior.

The Religious Factor

In the 1950s, Richard Scammon, premier master of election statistics, used to say that the two most important issues in every American election, in terms of determining how votes were cast, were the Reformation and the Civil War. By this Scammon meant that these two great dividers, at least one of which was religious, regularly aligned most northern Protestants behind the Republican party and most Catholics and white southerners, most of whom were Protestants, with the Democrats.

The religious character of the Reformation is obvious. Even outside the South, its political significance varied. After the massive waves of Catholic immigration to industrial and mining centers of the Northeast and Great Lakes states during the second half of the nineteenth century, most Protestants in these areas banded together in the Republican party as a means for preserving the quasi-official, though not legally established, Protestant quality of American life. America had been the promised land of Protestantism—the place where, as Jonathan Edwards predicted in the eighteenth century, "the latter-day glory is probably to begin." Well into the twentieth century, a large majority of Americans regarded Protestant mores and values, to some extent secularized, as the underlying foundation of national culture.

Distrust of Catholicism among Protestants was not wholly based on theological differences or simple prejudice. ("What," a young staff member at one of the mainline Protestant Washington offices recently asked me, "was all *that* about?") Before the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the international Catholic church held that, wherever politically feasible, Catholicism "ought to be, by constitutional law, the one religion of the state." As late as 1939, Pope Pius XII reaffirmed the traditional doctrine: "That which does not correspond to the truth and the norm of morality has, objectively, no right either to existence or to propaganda or to action." Such views were interpreted by many Protestants, and other non-Catholics, as challenges to religious freedom.[3]

Catholics responded, for religious and cultural as well as economic reasons, by giving their allegiance to the relatively more liberal Democrats. Even in the late nineteenth century, there were exceptions, such as the Irish Catholic divisions of the Republican machines that ran Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and the so-called swallow-tail faction of New York Protestant Democrats who supplied most of the Democratic candidates for president (in-

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cluding the only winner, Grover Cleveland) from the Civil War to 1896. But in general Protestants in the urbanized areas of the Northeast and Great Lakes region were Republicans and Catholics were Democrats. These allegiances were reinforced by the operations of patronage-based party machines.

In the more rural regions of the Midwest, where Catholics were less numerous, and in much of the Far West, where religious observance tended to be more casual, denominational identification had less political effect, and other issues, often economic, were more likely to structure politics. Even in those areas outside the South, however, the ties of pan-Protestantism helped maintain normal Republican dominance.

In the South, for the most part heavily Protestant, the effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction gathered most whites into the Democratic party, in part because the Republicans were regarded as the party of the victorious and oppressive North, and even more after the end of Reconstruction in 1877 as a means for excluding blacks from participation, including eventually the right to vote, in southern politics. These ties were not themselves religious, but were reinforced by southern Protestant churches, mostly Baptist and Methodist, joined by Presbyterians and Episcopalians at the upper rungs of society, many of which had split from northern counterparts on the slavery issue before the Civil War and had loyally supported the Confederacy. (In a notable instance, Episcopal Bishop Leonidas Polk of Louisiana had laid aside his clerical duties in 1861 to become a general in the Confederate army.) Leaders of many of these religious bodies were integrated into state and local Democratic party power structures.

In the North, the Union cause in the Civil War had been fed by religious passions, which had helped erase an earlier political divide between Protestant denominations. In the political battles of the early republic, the more formal and austere Calvinist denominations, usually joined by the Episcopalians and Quakers, staunchly supported the succeeding relatively conservative Federalist and Whig parties, while the more evangelical Methodists and Baptists were enthusiastic Jeffersonians and Jacksonian Democrats. "I have waged an incessant warfare," declared the popular frontier evangelist Peter Cartwright, "against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and other enemies of the Democratic party."[4] This division, in part economic (evangelicals were generally poor and agrarian), was swept aside by common attachment to the party leading the war against slavery and southern secession. In the last third of the nineteenth century, northern Protestant pastors commonly urged their parishioners to, "Vote as we pray," supplementing Republican orators' appeal to, "Vote as you shot." German Lutherans, who earlier had often joined the Democrats as a refuge against Sabbatarian and prohibitionist laws sponsored by reformist Whigs, were similarly drawn to the broad Republican

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coalition.[5]

African Americans, rising from slavery in the South and entering more actively into civil life in the North, were socially and politically organized through their Protestant churches, mostly Baptist and Methodist (broken away from parent denominations in response to racial discrimination by white majorities). These, both in the South, until they were almost completely excluded from politics in the 1890s, and the North, where they remained politically vibrant, were uniformly loyal to the party of Lincoln that had ended slavery and continued to be relatively liberal on civil rights issues.

Jews, who had maintained small communities in major eastern cities since colonial times, began emigrating to the United States in substantial numbers toward the end of the nineteenth century. They seem in this period to have been mainly either Republicans or Socialists—the former following the leadership of influential bankers and merchants, and the latter preserving ideological inclinations developed in the ghettos of Europe.

Religion and Reform

During the latter part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth, the Social Gospel movement achieved considerable force within American Protestantism. Building on the Whig reform tradition that earlier had given birth to abolitionism and prohibitionism, eloquent Social Gospel ministers such as Walter Rauschenbush, Josiah Strong, and Washington Gladden, and their feminist allies such as Susan B. Anthony and Frances Willard, applied moral values they found in the Bible to attack social, economic, and political ills associated with dynamically expanding industrial capitalism. The Social Gospellers aimed their rebukes not only at moral vices but also at systemic failures they concluded were inherent in unregulated market capitalism.

Both leaderships and laities in most Protestant denominations remained predominantly conservative in their political and economic attachments, basing their views on their own interpretations of the more austere and socially traditional side of Christianity as well as on their interests as part of the dominant social group. The Social Gospellers, however, made strong inroads in seminaries, among younger clergy, and even among some socially traditionalist laity, leading to what Martin Marty has called a Protestant "two-party system," pitting dominant conservatives against insurgent reformers.[6] Social Gospel militance was to some extent allied with the growth of rationalist liberalism, adapting biblical teachings to fit Darwinism and other findings of modern science, in what were later called the "mainline" Protestant denominations: Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, some branches of Lutheranism, and some smaller churches.

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The Protestant two-party system was at first only indirectly linked to the competition between Republicans and Democrats in the larger polity. Most Social Gospellers, sharing the general northern Protestant view of the Democracy as the party of "rum, Romanism, and rebellion," continued to work within the Republican party or joined the new Prohibition party. When a change in New York election law inadvertently permitted woman's suffrage in a single election, Susan Anthony proudly cast her ballot for "the straight Republican ticket." Within Republican ranks, Social Gospellers gave support to progressive reformers such as Robert LaFollette in Wisconsin, Hiram Johnson in California, George Norris in Nebraska, and Theodore Roosevelt in New York.

The deep economic depression of the 1890s sorely strained the Republican loyalties of many northern Protestants, particularly in the rural Midwest. The new Populist party that formed in the early 1890s gained support from many evangelical Protestant farmers. Populist publicists and politicians tied economic grievances to a vision of a "New Jerusalem" that went back at least to the Reformation. Positive proposals for economic and social reforms were mixed with rancorous sentiments of anti-Catholicism, ant-Semitism, and anti-urbanism in general. When populist forces won control of the Democratic party in 1896, William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech at the Democratic national convention, urging coinage of silver on equal terms with gold, used religious imagery to convey social and cultural as well as economic discontents.

Bryan's candidacy for president on both Democratic and Populist tickets in 1896 attracted some backing among his fellow evangelical Protestants, helping him carry nine normally Republican midwestern and Rocky Mountain states. But most church leaderships, Catholic as well as Protestant, alarmed by Bryan's perceived economic and social radicalism, gave open or tacit support to his victorious Republican opponent, William McKinley. Catholic Archbishop John Ireland warned that the populists were "lighting torches which, borne in the hands of reckless men, may light up in our country the lurid fires of a commune." A leading Episcopal magazine declared that Bryan's election would cause "the ruin of national fiscal morality." On the Sunday before the election, many Protestant pastors preached against Bryanism with the text, "Thou Shalt Not Steal." The Republicans more than made up losses in the farm states with increased support from Catholics and mainline Protestants in growing urban areas of the Northeast and Great Lakes region.[7]

Return of prosperity under McKinley and his Republican successor, Theodore Roosevelt, temporarily wilted the economic roots of populism. But the religious and cultural discontents that Bryan had also tapped continued to percolate. Some of these were channeled into the theological

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struggles that many evangelicals, particularly among Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists, were waging against liberal rationalism. Early in the twentieth century, the term "fundamentalism" was coined to designate those who insisted on the literal truth of the Bible in "every sentence, every word, every syllable, every letter," and rejected Darwinism and all other findings of modern science they held to be inconsistent with scripture.

The next great wave of political reform came through the progressive movement that grew during the late 1890s and early 1900s. Like populism, progressivism drew on religious enthusiasms, but more among middle-class Social Gospellers than agrarian evangelicals. When Roosevelt, deserting the Republicans, accepted the Progressive party nomination for president in 1912, celebrating delegates at the Progressive convention, including some liberal Jews, sang rousing choruses of *Onward Christian Soldiers* and *The Battle Hymn of the Republic.* "We stand at Armageddon," Roosevelt exhorted, "and we battle for the Lord." The Progressive platform, said the religiously inspired urban reformer Jane Addams, contained "everything I have been fighting for."[8]

After Roosevelt's defeat, some progressives, including Social Gospellers, swung behind Woodrow Wilson's "New Freedom," which also embodied reform impulses. During Wilson's first term, considerable reform legislation was passed by the Democratic Congress, with help from the progressives. By 1920, however, most of the old progressives, having opposed the United States' entrance to World War I, and unpersuaded by Wilson's vision of a new international order, had rejoined the Republicans. In 1919, LaFollette, Norris, and Hiram Johnson led the fight in the Senate against the United States joining Wilson's proposed League of Nations. Among the lasting achievements of progressivism was enactment in 1920 of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, establishing woman's suffrage, strongly supported by the Social Gospellers and other religious groups.

The Churches Come to Washington

Evangelical Protestantism won its greatest political victory in 1919 with passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, prohibiting the manufacture or sale of intoxicating liquors. Prohibition seemed to work for a while, but soon had spawned a huge bootlegging industry that helped finance a teeming underworld culture and damaged respect for law among the general public. Failure of Prohibition, which was repealed in 1933, shook the political confidence of evangelicals. A further blow was struck when Bryan, coming out of retirement in 1925 to defend a Tennessee law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in the famous Scopes trial, was made a national laughingstock

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by Scopes's lawyer, the wily Clarence Darrow. Many evangelicals concluded that American society was hopelessly corrupt, and that a prudent Christian should avoid all participation in public life beyond paying taxes and voting.[9]

Catholic support for the Democratic party, which had waned somewhat when the Democrats were led by Bryan and Wilson (particularly among Irish and German Catholics during World War I), was renewed and reinforced by the party's nomination of Al Smith, the liberal Catholic governor of New York, for president in 1928. Smith went down to overwhelming defeat before Republican Herbert Hoover, after a campaign in which Smith's religion became an issue, particularly among normally Democratic southern Protestants. But near-solid Catholic support for Smith in eastern and midwestern cities provided a base for future Democratic successes. Jews, who had begun to regard the Democrats as the natural party of the excluded, also voted heavily for Smith.

The Great Depression that began in 1929 transformed American politics. Franklin Roosevelt, elected president in 1932, ushered in a long period of dominance by his victorious New Deal coalition, which included the old Democratic bases among Catholics and southern whites, plus secular liberals, many working-class and middle-class Protestants, most African Americans (after 1932) outside the South, and most Jews.

Leaderships of many mainline Protestant denominations reacted to the Depression with increased liberalism, even openness to socialism. The northern Presbyterian General Assembly resolved in 1932 that "nothing is more obvious than that the present economic order is now on probation." In 1934 the National Council of Methodist Youth endorsed socialism as "at present the most workable political expression of Christian social ideals." Except for 1936, when Roosevelt was reelected by a huge majority to a second term, however, substantial majorities of nonsouthern Protestants, both clergy and laity, continued to support the Republicans.[10]

The flow of governmental authority to Washington under the New Deal and during World War II, which the United States entered in 1941, caused many religious groups to open or expand advocacy operations in the national capital. The Methodists had established an outpost on Capitol Hill early in the twentieth century to promote Prohibition. The stately Methodist Building (which still houses most mainline Washington offices), across from the Supreme Court, was completed in 1923. During World War I, the Roman Catholic bishops, by now leading the nation's largest single denomination, authorized formation of the National Catholic War Council with an office in Washington. This body was transformed in 1919 to the National Catholic Welfare Council, charged with coordinating church activities that were national in scope. Until the mid-1940s, however, most denominations had no full-time representative dealing with the federal government.

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In 1946 the northern Presbyterians assigned a part-time observer to Washington "for the purpose of securing information rather than the purpose of influencing legislation." Later that same year, the Baptist Joint Conference Committee opened a Washington office—mainly, according to one Baptist commentator, "to watch the Catholics." In 1948 the Methodist Women's Division appointed a full-time Washington representative to work on issues that went beyond the Methodists' traditional support for temperance. A study in 1951 found sixteen churches maintaining Washington offices, often, the study's author wrote, promoting "causes in which groups of church leaders are interested rather than the views of church members in general."[11]

Growing concentration by major elements of the religious community on Washington in part reflected centralization of both political and economic power in the larger society. But it also represented a tendency among some institutional leaderships—Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish—to find religious values dictating agreement with particular secular ideologies, usually liberal or socialist. As a student at the University of Pennsylvania in the early 1950s, I was startled to receive a publication from the Methodist campus fellowship linking Marx with Jesus. (In my upstate Pennsylvania hometown, almost all Methodists were Republicans.)

Roosevelt's leadership of the wartime alliance against Nazi Germany helped solidify Jewish alignment with the Democratic party—though some Jews, particularly among intellectuals, criticized Roosevelt for not having done more to help Jews escape from Europe before the Holocaust. More than 90 percent of Jews voted for Roosevelt's election to a fourth term in 1944. Prompt recognition of Israel in 1948 by Harry Truman, Roosevelt's successor, reinforced Jewish loyalty to the Democrats.

During the Republican administrations of Dwight Eisenhower in the 1950s, some Catholics were drawn by growing affluence and movement out of city ethnic neighborhoods to the suburbs, as well as fierce anti-Communism, to political conservatism. Disapproval among Catholics of the divorced status of Adlai Stevenson, Eisenhower's Democratic opponent in 1952 and 1956, also contributed to a mild shift among Catholics to the Republicans. Most Catholics, however, remained normally Democratic, in part out of a kind of tribal identification that a good Catholic should be a loyal Democrat, and in part because Catholic communitarian values were consistent with the Democrats' support for a growing welfare state.

Rejection at the 1956 Democratic national convention of the vice-presidential bid of the young Irish Catholic senator from Massachusetts, John Kennedy, helped sway some Catholic voters to Eisenhower in the fall election. When the Democrats four years later nominated Kennedy as their presidential candidate, Catholic defectors returned overwhelmingly to the

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Democratic ticket. Kennedy's election as the first Catholic president, the historian of American Catholicism James Hennesey writes, "loosened the psychological defensiveness that had historically marked the American Catholic."[12]

As they had against Al Smith in 1928, many Protestant clergy, mainline as well as evangelical, preached against Kennedy's election. During the fall of 1960, I attended a Sunday morning service at the Foundry Methodist Church in Washington (where the Clintons worshiped after 1993), where I heard a fiery sermon on the theme that American democracy was founded in the cradle of the Reformation and might not survive if separated from it. Defections from Kennedy among some normally Democratic Protestants, particularly in the South, were not sufficient to prevent his victory over the Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, in a close election.

The African American Church in Politics

Kennedy's assassination in the fall of 1963 was a dark foretaste of what turned out to be a prolonged period of political and social turmoil. The 1960s began, however, with enthusiastic collaboration among most religious groups, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish, in support of historic civil rights legislation. Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson, later said that the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which followed, could not have been passed without the dedicated backing of churches and synagogues.

African American churches, led by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and many other black ministers, were in the forefront of the civil rights struggle. "The black church," Leonard Gadzepko writes, beside providing personnel and logistical support, "gave the movement an ideological framework through which passive attitudes were transformed into a collective consciousness supportive of collective action."[13]

Though African Americans had largely shifted to the Democrats in the 1930s, many blacks, particularly in the South, where most Democratic officeholders supported racial segregation, remained loyal to the Republicans. In 1956, Eisenhower received about 40 percent of the black vote, and in 1960, 32 percent of blacks voted for Nixon. But when the Republicans in 1964 chose Barry Goldwater, who had opposed the Civil Rights Act, as their candidate for president, African Americans moved almost unanimously into the Democratic column.

There they have largely remained ever since. While other sources of political leadership have developed, African American ministers such as

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Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young, and William Grey have continued to be major political figures, and blacks are still more politically organized and represented through their churches than any other ethnic or religious group.

Some African American church leaders have come to feel that black interests would be better served if Republicans were attracted to offer more competition for black voters, or if the Democrats were challenged on the left by a new third party. But through the 1990s at least, most stuck to the strategy of increasing black turnout to produce Democratic victories in close national and state elections. A small but highly visible minority of blacks have converted to Islam, giving effective, though at times bitterly antagonistic, leadership to African American militance.[14]

The Divided Mainline

Among mainline Protestant leaderships, some of the enthusiasm generated by the civil rights struggle was carried over in the late 1960s and early 1970s into protest against the Vietnam War—though with much less united support among church laity. Mainline leaderships, through their national headquarters and Washington offices, moved increasingly to the left. At their annual, biennial, or quadrennial national assemblies, mainline denominations regularly took highly liberal stands on a wide range of economic, social, cultural, and foreign-policy issues. These pronouncements came to resemble political party platforms. During the Republican Reagan and Bush administrations of the 1980s and early 1990s, mainline offices in Washington kept up steady attacks on many executive branch policies.

The liberal shift of mainline leaderships received broad support from many of the clergy coming out of seminaries, themselves hotbeds of liberalism, after the late 1960s. Some social activists among mainline laities also took up liberal causes. For the most part, however, mainline laities remained moderate or conservative and continued in most elections to vote Republican. Mainline liberals have argued that polling figures showing Republican majorities among their laities are misleading because these include many who are no more than nominal members. Surveys have shown, however, that active mainline Protestants tend to be *more* politically conservative than those who identify with their churches in name only. The political split between national leaderships and local laities gradually became divisive within mainline denominations such as Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, and probably contributed to the sharp decline in mainline memberships, while evangelicals were growing, after the 1960s.[15]

There were several reasons for the leftward shift of mainline leaderships,

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seminaries, and many clergy. Some carried on the Social Gospel tradition, which found a mandate for political liberalism or socialism in the Old and New Testaments. "The Gospel is a political tract or it is nothing!" a young minister told me after a talk I gave to a church conference in the late 1980s. Opposition to the Vietnam War, which had brought many young people to seminaries in the first place, hardened political attitudes. The attraction of "liberation theology," which was first developed among Catholics in Latin America, provided ideological direction. Horror over the likely effects of nuclear war induced many liberal Protestants to promote accommodation with the Soviet Union and other communist countries. "Feminist theology" encouraged some of the many women entering mainline clergies, as well as male sympathizers, to reject much of traditional Protestantism, including much of the language of the Bible itself. "I never go to church," a young woman on the professional staff of a mainline Washington office whom I interviewed in the 1980s told me. "I can't stand all that father-business and son-business."

In promoting liberal causes, mainline activists often formed alliances with secular liberals. These sometimes led them to take positions to preserve political solidarity. A national mainline strategist told me that support by the churches for the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment bill in the 1970s, which many moderate as well as conservative economists criticized as inherently inflationary, came in response to pressure from trade-union allies. On issues like abortion, many mainline activists felt the need to keep proving their liberal credentials with secular feminists.

Development of genuine pluralism in American society, which Kennedy's election as the first Catholic president demonstrated, also may have been a factor in liberal politicization of mainline leadership and clergy. Many of the old Social Gospellers had shared the widespread Protestant view of America as an essentially Protestant nation with free exercise rights constitutionally guaranteed to minorities. Mainline Protestant clergy, liberal as well as conservative, had often felt that they served as an unofficial moral conscience for the nation as a whole. After Kennedy's election, this view was harder to sustain. Pluralism, as Will Herberg's prescient 1955 book *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* announced, had arrived. No longer able to regard themselves as part of an informal establishment, some Protestant clergy may have been drawn to define themselves in opposition to the existing system.[16]

Beneath all this lay currents that had grown in liberal Protestantism since the early nineteenth century. Influential theologians had come to hold, often in opaque language, that foundational Christian beliefs, such as the immortality of individual souls, the divinity of Jesus Christ, and even the existence of a theistic God, all still devoutly if usually unreflectively maintained by most Protestants at the pew level, are metaphorical symbols, not

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to be taken literally, of some deeper metaphysical reality. The "God is dead" theology of the 1960s had voguish impact in seminaries. Some Protestant theologians, joined by a few Catholics, rejected the "uniqueness" of Christianity and gave credence to the findings of the "Jesus Seminar" that regularly voted on which of the sayings of Jesus reported by the Gospels are "authentic." For these, Christianity was subsumed into a new super-religion, emphasizing a vague "spirituality" that would motivate good works in a multicultural society. Many mainline clergy were intellectually shaped by these tendencies. "The last thing they wanted was for their congregations to find out what they really believed," a younger Methodist theologian and historian recently told me. "So they stopped talking about doctrine." Among such clergy, and laity who shared their views, liberal social activism provided an outlet for spiritual and moral energies.

Evangelicals to the Right

While mainline leaderships and many clergy were moving to the left politically, many evangelicals, emphasizing personal salvation and the authority of scripture, were going in exactly the opposite direction. After the disappointments of the 1920s, most evangelicals had withdrawn from politics, even from civil life. The revivalist campaigns of the 1950s led by charismatic preachers such as Billy Graham had renewed evangelical morale and brought converts to evangelical churches. But this phase of evangelical awakening, despite Graham's highly publicized friendships with numerous presidents, was generally apolitical. To the extent that evangelicals were involved in politics, chiefly through voting, they remained mostly Democrats, in part because they were concentrated in the still one-party South.

In the late 1970s, all this changed. A new wave of television evangelists, including Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, helped guide evangelical laity toward increased political activity on the conservative and Republican side. The TV ministers were preaching to an audience already in ferment. Supreme Court decisions in the 1960s prohibiting prayer and Bible reading in the public schools had enraged evangelicals, along with many other Americans. The Court's decision in 1973 establishing a constitutional right to abortion further inflamed opinion (though abortion had not historically been a major issue with evangelicals.) These judicial decisions, which many evangelicals associated with rising crime, spreading drug use, a rising divorce rate, pervasive sex and violence in television and movies, and other forces of unwelcome social change, were traced to the influence of political liberalism. Racial desegregation of public schools in the South

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also helped turn many southern whites against the liberal leadership of the Democratic party. The message preached by Falwell (who had earlier argued against any involvement by Christians in politics), Robertson, and other conservative TV preachers thus fell on ripe soil.[17]

In the late 1970s, right-wing political conservatives like Paul Weyrich and Howard Phillips spotted white evangelicals as the "sleeping giant" of American politics. In 1979, Weyrich persuaded Falwell to form the Moral Majority as a means for rallying evangelicals and fundamentalists behind conservative policies and candidates. The religious right was born.

The Moral Majority was never much more than a letterhead organization of evangelical preachers, fronted by Falwell. But its rise to national prominence, largely created by excited media critics, coincided with a sharp shift in political behavior by white evangelicals. (Most blacks are evangelical in religious practice and belief but have followed a very different political course.) After supporting their fellow evangelical Jimmy Carter in 1976, white evangelicals, now comprising more than 20 percent of the national electorate, voted by a two-to-one margin for the conservative Republican candidate for president, Ronald Reagan, against Carter in 1980. By 1984, Reagan's majority among white evangelicals rose to almost 80 percent. Four years later, only a slightly reduced majority of evangelicals backed Reagan's Republican successor, George Bush.[18]

The experience of the 1980s showed both the strengths and the weaknesses of the evangelicals' participation in politics. The evangelicals' shift unquestionably contributed to the Republicans' growth of strength and the change of national politics in a more conservative direction. Both Reagan and Bush in office, however, concentrated more on economic and foreign policy goals than on the social changes, such as limitations on abortion and restoration of school prayer, particularly sought by evangelicals. Doctrinal differences between fundamentalists and pentecostalists, and personal rivalries among strong-willed preachers, undermined political unity. Robertson's candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination in 1988 failed to win the support of even a majority of evangelicals. In 1989, Falwell, facing falling membership and declining contributions, disbanded the Moral Majority.

Robertson soon launched the Christian Coalition to take its place. Under the management of a shrewd political operator, Ralph Reed, the Christian Coalition for a time seemed to be building a genuine national political organization, reaching beyond evangelicals to other conservative Christians. Liberals and the media again began to warn of a formidable right-wing religious force. The 1990s would produce both further triumphs and disappointments for the religious right.

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Catholics No Longer Monolithic

Catholics also underwent political change after the 1960s, though not as spectacular as that among white evangelicals. In 1972, faced with a choice for president between the incumbent Republican Nixon and his perceived radical Democratic opponent George McGovern, Catholics by a narrow majority for the first time in American history supported the Republican candidate. After returning to the Democrats, in the wake of the Watergate scandals, to vote for Carter in 1976, Catholics gave majorities to Reagan in both 1980 and 1984, and split about evenly between Bush and the Democrat Michael Dukakis in 1988. In the 1990s, Catholics voted for Bill Clinton in both 1992 and 1996, but by much smaller majorities than they usually gave to Democrats before the 1970s. A survey by the Pew Research Center in 1996 found white Catholics (which in Pew's definition does not include Hispanics) dividing about equally among Democrats, Republicans, and independents.[19]

The Supreme Court's ruling in 1973 establishing a constitutional right to abortion mobilized the institutional Catholic church in a campaign to pass a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion or at least to enact legislation limiting the abortion right. This drive placed the church in diametric opposition to the Democratic party, which in its national platforms repeatedly affirmed support for unlimited abortion rights. The Republican party, in contrast, after 1980 firmly backed the right-to-life (anti-abortion) position.

The effect of the abortion controversy on Catholic voters probably went beyond the small minority of committed right-to-lifers. Catholics who were liberal on economic and foreign policy issues continued to vote Democratic. But the growing number of Catholics with conservative economic and social inclinations, finding the church and the Democrats opposed on a basic moral issue, felt released from the old tribal bond of Catholics to the Democratic party and increasingly cast Republican ballots. Even many Catholics who were not particularly moved by the abortion issue were offended by the refusal of the 1992 Democratic national convention to permit the Democratic Catholic governor of Pennsylvania Robert Casey to speak against the pro-choice plank in the party platform.

The institutional church, through its annual fall conferences of bishops in Washington, was pulled in different directions on the conventional ideological scale by different issues. On abortion and some other social issues, as well as in support of the movement to provide state-financed vouchers to parents of children attending parochial or other private schools, the bishops were drawn to the conservative side. But on economic and

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many international issues, they remained predominantly liberal. The bishops' influential letter on nuclear arms policy in 1983 sharply criticized the Reagan administration's strategy of using the threat of nuclear weapons to intimidate the Soviet Union (a policy followed by every president since Truman). Their letter on economic policy in 1986 called for extensive redistribution of wealth and increased government intervention in the market economy—with considerably less effect than the nuclear policy letter on Catholic or general public opinion.

By the end of the 1980s, the institutional church itself was changing. Declining numbers of priests and nuns, as well as the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, were giving laity a growing role in church direction. Appointments by Pope John Paul II, an economic liberal but a theological and social conservative, were making the bishops a more conservative body. In background, the bishops, who formerly had been drawn mainly from working-class origins, were increasingly middle class, reflecting social change in Catholic population. The bishops, nevertheless, continued to support "communitarian" values, in the sense of favoring a substantial role for government in shaping economic and social life.[20]

The Catholic share of the national population continued to grow in the 1980s and 1990s, reaching almost 30 percent. This increase, however, was largely due to the huge influx of American Hispanic immigrants, mostly Catholics. Among earlier arrived European ethnic groups, Catholic affiliation somewhat declined. Church observance was sharply down from the 1960s, only about 40 percent reporting weekly church attendance.[21]

Hispanic Catholics are not an ethnically or politically homogeneous group. In Florida, predominantly Cuban Hispanics, fleeing the Castro regime and largely middle class, have become a bulwark of Republicanism. In Texas, the Southwest, and California, however, much more numerous Latinos from Mexico and Central America, usually at lower levels of income and social status, have overwhelmingly supported the Democrats. Puerto Ricans in New York and other northeastern states are also heavily Democratic. Conservative social attitudes among Hispanics (though mixed with relatively relaxed views on such matters as church attendance) have encouraged Republicans not to give up pursuit of Hispanic voters (as they had until recently among blacks). Republican support for restrictions on immigration, widely interpreted by Hispanics, even Cubans, as "playing the nativist card," however, actually reduced support for Republican candidates during the 1990s, particularly in the electorally crucial state of California.[22] Swimming against this tide, Republican Governor George W. Bush in Texas, through earnest courtship of Mexican American voters and stress on social solidarity, won about half the Hispanic vote in his 1998 reelection.

A study of Catholic voters by Lawrence Kapp in the late 1990s found a

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continuing swing among "traditionalist" Catholics, holding conservative social attitudes though often continuing to approve a large role for government in the economy, toward the Republicans. Catholics, however, are steadily less inclined to vote as members of a religious group.[23] In any case, the days of almost monolithic support among Catholics for the Democratic party seem to be over.

Still Liberal Jews

Political behavior among Jews also changed somewhat after 1970, but remained much more consistent with earlier patterns. Though a small minority in the national population—about two percent—Jews since the 1930s have played an important part in national politics. Their influence has been magnified by their prowess as fund-raisers, enthusiastic participation in civil life, strong representation in the news and entertainment industries and academe, and concentration in electorally rich states like New York and California. Though Jewish support for the Democrats receded from the extraordinary levels of the Roosevelt and Truman years, the great majority of Jews continued to vote Democratic.

Through most of the twentieth century, active religious observance among Jews has been relatively low. Their group voice in politics has been expressed as much by secular Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League as by organized religious denominations. These secular agencies stay close to Jewish religious leaders, some of whom serve on their boards, and seek to represent "Jewish values," focused in recent years on "an amalgam of ethnic loyalty and political liberalism."[24]

In the 1970s, some Jews began to feel uneasy with traditional liberal allies. Growth of sympathy for the Palestinian cause in parts of the liberal community, particularly among mainline Protestants and some secular liberals, seemed antagonistic toward Israel. "To be 'liberal,'" Nathan Glazer wrote in 1972, "might mean . . . to support leftists who wished to see Israel destroyed, to oppose American aid to Israel."[25] More generally, many Jews became convinced that defense of Israel, as well as resistance to the international challenge of the Soviet Union, required a militarily strong United States, and grew impatient with pacifist doves in the liberal camp. Moving away from the McGovern brand of liberalism on military and foreign policy, some Jews joined the conservative critique of big government liberalism on social and economic issues as well.

Jewish dissatisfaction with liberalism and the direction of the Democratic party became most pronounced during the later phases of the Carter administration. In the 1980 election, only about 40 percent of Jews voted

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for Carter's reelection, with about 40 percent supporting Reagan, and 20 percent backing the independent candidate John Anderson. Though Reagan stoutly supported Israel, most Jews soon became dissatisfied with his performance on domestic issues. The large role of the religious right in the Reagan coalition was particularly disturbing to many Jews. A report prepared for the American Jewish Congress in 1984 concluded: "Jews still stand to the left of where Americans as a whole are standing."[26]

The Bush administration that took office in 1989 seemed less supportive of Israel than Reagan had been and no less beholden to the religious right. By the end of the 1980s many Jews had decided, as one of their leaders said, that Republican White Houses "do not look Jewish."

The band of "neo-conservative" writers and intellectuals who in recent years have given much ideological direction and programmatic substance to the moderate wing of the Republican party has included many Jews, such as Irving and William Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Norman Podhoretz, Martin Feldstein, and Elliott Abrams. These, however, have been a distinctly minority voice within the Jewish community.

Since 1980, Jews have generally given more than 70 percent of their vote to Democratic candidates, rising to 81 percent for Bill Clinton in 1996. The Pew survey in 1996 found almost half of Jews identifying themselves as Democrats, but 37 percent as independents and 15 percent as Republicans.[27] Many Jews (like many other Americans) seem to long for a progressive national leader like the two Roosevelts, Theodore and Franklin, regardless of party affiliation.

Albert Gore's selection of Joseph Lieberman as his vice-presidential running mate in the 2000 election no doubt reinforced the loyalty of most Jews to the Democratic party. Some liberal Jews, however, were critical of Lieberman's insistence on the role of religion in public discourse.

A Changed Political Environment

In the 1990s many religious groups, and their representatives in national political life, seemed to pull back from the extreme partisanship and bitter antagonism that had developed during the 1980s. In part this change grew from disappointments and setbacks that most groups suffered at various times during the decade. In part, too, it may have reflected recognition of some shared values in the midst of rapidly rising secular materialism and moral dislocation.

Early in the decade, the religious right seemed to be riding high. Under Ralph Reed's operational direction, the Christian Coalition appeared to function with far more political sophistication and national organizational depth than was ever achieved by the Moral Majority. When the Republicans won control of both houses of Congress in 1994, for the first time in forty

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years, the media gave the disciplined legions of the religious right much of the credit. Clyde Wilcox, a leading scholarly observer of conservative religious political movements, predicted in 1996 that "the Christian Right will probably become institutionalized as a permanent fixture in American politics."[28]

Once in office, however, the new Republican majority in Congress, consistently outmaneuvered by Clinton, had trouble delivering on its promises. Conservative evangelicals decided, as they had with Reagan and Bush, that their issues were given low priority. The Christian Coalition began to experience some of the same kind of infighting that had undermined the Moral Majority. Reed, his relationship with Robertson showing signs of strain, departed to take up a career as a political consultant. A survey of Washington insiders by *Fortune* magazine in the fall of 1999 found that the Christian Coalition dropped in one year from seventh to thirty-fifth place in estimates of organizations with "political clout." By the end of 1999, Wilcox had concluded that the Christian Coalition had "fallen apart," with only about six viable state organizations remaining. [29]

Some analysts have detected a tendency among evangelicals to react to setbacks in the 1990s by returning to their former political passivity. *Blinded by Might,* a 1999 book by two former Falwell lieutenants, Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, was widely interpreted to recommend retreat by evangelicals from politics. Read more closely, Thomas and Dobson argue that the *church as church* should stay out of political campaigns, but maintain that churches and other religious institutions should motivate their members to active participation in politics and other aspects of civic life.[30]

The decline of the Christian Coalition and some similar religious right organizations does not necessarily indicate a fall in either the participation or influence of evangelicals in national politics. The role of the less partisan and more moderate National Association of Evangelicals, under the direction of the new head of its Washington office Richard Cizik, seems actually to have increased. Wilcox has found evidence that the longer conservative evangelical activists participate in politics, the more willing they are to compromise with others in the Republican party to advance common electoral interests.[31] This may anger some among their more impassioned supporters but in the long run may increase their political effectiveness. The fact is that the Republican party cannot hope to win national elections without the strong backing it has received since 1980 from evangelicals. The problem for the Republicans has been that identification with a strident religious right frightens and turns off needed moderate supporters, most of whom are by no means hostile to religion. As evangelicals in politics become more pragmatic, they increase the possibility that a broad Republican coalition, in which they play a significant part, may win endur-

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ing political success.

Attacks by Senator John McCain during his race for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000 on Robertson and Falwell may have deepened the tension between evangelicals and other elements in the Republican coalition. In the short run, however, they mobilized evangelicals to give overwhelming support to McCain's victorious opponent, George W. Bush.

Mainline Protestant offices in Washington have also found disappointments in and learned lessons from the events of the 1990s. The Republican takeover of Congress at the beginning of 1995 created a legislative atmosphere in which they had never before operated. (The last time the Republicans controlled both houses of Congress in the early 1950s, the mainline lobbies were not yet well off the ground.) They at first reacted by lining up firmly behind the Clinton administration. During the budget fight between Clinton and the Republican Congress in the fall of 1995, mainline church leaders took the unusual step of gathering in the Oval Office to place their hands on the president's shoulders in apparent endorsement of his cause. They also joined Clinton in opposing the Republican version of welfare reform.

Though Clinton easily won the budget battle, he later, as the 1996 election approached, disappointed the mainline leaderships by signing the Republican welfare-reform bill passed by Congress. Mainline leaders generally opposed Clinton's impeachment in 1999, but, according to one familiar with their views, felt "betrayed and disillusioned by his unbelievably stupid behavior."

When Republican congressional majorities were maintained, though by reduced margins, in 1996 and 1998, the mainline Washington offices began reaching out not only to moderate Republicans in Congress but also to conservatives, many of them active members of mainline churches. The drive in 1999 by mainline denominations, in cooperation with Catholic and Jewish groups, to win substantial reduction of debt owed by poorer countries to the United States—perhaps the most successful legislative effort by the combined religious community since the civil rights struggle of the 1960s—won support not only from congressional liberals and moderates but also from some conservative Republicans, such as House Majority Leader Richard Armey and Representative Spencer Bachus of Alabama. Mainline lobbyists found, somewhat to their surprise, that some conservatives were open to appeals on the basis of shared religious values.

The sociologist Robert Wuthnow, who since the 1980s has closely followed mainline Protestant behavior, observes that the mainline denominations in recent years have moved away from grand visions of social and economic restructuring and have concentrated more on incremental reforms.

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"There is less talk of major changes in the tax system, and more attention to issues like raising the earned income tax credit." In the foreign policy area, "liberation theology" has largely lost attraction, giving way to support for specific measures, such as debt relief for Third World countries and international banning of land mines. Objective developments, as well as shifts in the political balance, may have influenced attitudes among mainline leaders. According to one veteran mainline social activist: "The way the Cold War turned out and the apparent success so far of welfare reform took some of the wind out of the liberals' sails."[32]

Washington representatives of the Catholic church, too, have learned to make their way in a changed political and legislative environment. In this process, the Catholic political scholar David Walsh points out, the more hierarchical structure of the Catholic church provides operational advantages. According to John Carr, chief legislative strategist for the United States Catholic Conference, the church's policy is no longer "so much formed from the top down," and the bishops are "more open to influence from the grassroots." [33] Washington lawmakers, non-Catholic as well as Catholic, however, still regard Catholic lobbyists as speaking more than their Protestant counterparts for a united church. Catholic influence also has broadened through the rising representation of Catholics among Republicans in Congress: of the 122 Catholics in the House of Representatives after the 1998 election, about two-fifths were Republicans.

Realignment and Convergence

The electoral behavior of religious groups during the 1990s moved away from divisions along denominational lines, and toward divisions within denominations based on religious practice and belief. At the same time, at the policy level there has been some tendency toward convergence among religious groups, liberals and conservatives at times joining forces on faith-related issues. These tendencies are to some extent in tension with each other.

At the electoral level, "traditionalists" across Protestant and Catholic denominations, who react to "social modernization and secularizing tendencies in American life" by "reemphasizing orthodox religious beliefs" and "stressing historic religious practices," have come together in the Republican party, increasingly giving the Republicans some of the character of a European Christian Democratic party. A study of the 1996 election by the political scientists John Green, Lyman Kellstedt, James Guth, and Corwin Smidt found that 63 percent of traditionalist white Catholics (not including Hispanics), 72 percent of traditionalist white mainline Protestants, and 79

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percent of traditionalist white evangelical Protestants voted for Republican candidates for Congress. These groups were joined by Mormons, numerically small nationally but strongly represented in Utah and some other western states, who voted 79 percent Republican.[34]

In opposition to these groups, "modernists" among Catholics and mainline Protestants, who react to social change and rising secularism by "revising historic religious beliefs" and "producing new rituals or practices," have trended toward the Democrats. In 1996, by the measures used by Green and his associates, 63 percent of modernist white Catholics and 54 percent of modernist white mainline Protestants (but only 40 percent of modernist evangelicals) voted for Democrats for Congress. They were joined by 68 percent of Jews, 86 percent of African Americans, 82 percent of Catholic Hispanics, 67 percent of the growing body of "seculars" who claim no religious affiliation (13 percent of the total), and 61 percent of those whom Green and his associates found to be only "nominally religious." [35]

Traditionalists outnumber modernists among white Catholics and evangelicals, and modernists are slightly more numerous than traditionalists among mainline Protestants.

Obviously, other factors beside religious practice and belief, particularly economic divisions, will strongly influence future elections. But if the patterns of the 1990s are maintained, it seems likely that the future balance of American politics will be significantly affected by the strengths of these religious and cultural tendencies: traditionalists versus modernists and seculars. Historic trends and theories of inevitable secularization might seem to favor movement toward the side of the modernists and seculars. There is some evidence, however, both in the revival of traditionalism and theological realism in some prominent mainline seminaries, such as Princeton, Duke, and Wesley in Washington, D.C., and public reaction shown in polls against the perceived moral and social effects of secularization, that traditionalism may enjoy at least a short-term upswing.[36] Traditionalists, moreover, have shown more inclination to vote on the basis of their religious and cultural preferences, giving traditionalist values relatively more weight in the electoral balance. Whether the traditionalist coalition will survive charges of "anti-Catholicism" hurled by liberals at the Republican establishment in connection with Bush's highly publicized visit to the resolutely anti-Catholic Bob Jones University during the 2000 South Carolina primary, and the dispute over appointment of a new chaplain for the House of Representatives (which took on some of the quality of an Anthony Trollope novel), remains to be seen.

At the social policy level, a kind of convergence on some issues among religious groups seems to be taking place, complicating the political effects of religion. Most major religious groups have recently worked together at

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the national level on a number of critical, though not necessarily headline-grabbing, issues. Probably the most important of these was the successful drive in 1999 for debt relief for Third World nations. "It would not have happened," said John Carr, "without the leadership of the religious community." Jay Lintner, interim director of the Washington office of the National Council of Churches, agreed: "Working together, we achieved far more than we at first thought was possible."[37]

Ad hoc coalitions have formed on other issues. Rabbi David Sapperstein, director for more than twenty years of the Washington office of Reform Judaism and a severe critic of the religious right, finds himself working with conservative evangelicals, as well as with Catholics and mainline Protestants, on such causes as defense of religious freedom abroad, crime prevention, and attack on international prostitution and sexual exploitation of women and children.[38] Catholics, evangelicals, and most mainline denominations, after some initial skepticism, are exploring the potentialities of the charitable-choice provision of the 1996 welfare-reform act, which facilitates cooperation between government and faith-based organizations to improve delivery of social services to the poor and disabled and to combat juvenile delinquency and drug addiction.

The extent of issue-focused collaboration among religious groups should not be exaggerated. Plenty of differences still exist. Most Jewish and mainline Protestant organizations continue to oppose state-funded vouchers for parents of children attending church-related schools, which Catholics, most Orthodox Jews, and many evangelicals support. Vigorous opposition to abortion separates evangelicals and Catholics from Jewish and mainline Protestant leaderships. Catholics and conservative evangelicals part company on some welfare-state issues. After an initially united drive in 1999 to restore religious liberties restricted by the Supreme Court's 1991 decision expanding state authority to regulate religious practices, several mainline Protestant and Jewish organizations pulled out under pressure from civil liberties, civil rights, and gay rights groups. These groups argued that restoration of religious liberties might be interpreted to permit racial or gender discrimination—even though, Lintner says, opponents could not produce "instances of real discrimination."

Nevertheless, most religious groups are finding more common ground on social policy than would have seemed possible in the 1980s or early 1990s through their shared concerns over such continuing problems as family breakdown, failing education, persistent poverty, and international terrorism and repression in a time of general peace and prosperity.

Polls show that large majorities among the national public believe that religion provides a necessary foundation for social morality.[39] It may be this sense of the need for a religious and spiritual dimension to civil life, as well

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as pragmatic political calculations, that has caused many politicians, regardless of party or ideological orientation, to identify their policies with religious belief.

Carried too far, mingling religion and politics no doubt can pose dangers to civil life and to religion itself, as the Founders foresaw. But the principal Founders, including some who were not conventionally religious, such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, also believed moral values coming from religion are essential sources for democracy and republican government. Can "the liberties of a nation be thought secure," Jefferson wrote in 1781, "when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?" There seems, to me at least, no reason why moral principles derived from religious faith should not play a continuing role in political discourse, as they have through most of American history.

Georgetown University

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