

I. Politics and Polarization
II. Religion and Polarization

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I. POLITICS AND POLARIZATION

The election in 2004 left our country deeply divided over whether the country is deeply divided.¹ For some, America has become a politically polarized nation composed of people who detest George Bush and others who detest John Kerry, a split that in their view began even earlier, perhaps with the arguments over Bill Clinton in the 1990s, and that will continue well into the future as angry liberals confront equally angry conservatives. For others, however, most of the American people are moderate centrists who, though almost equally divided over some issues in 2004, harbor no deep partisan feelings.

By “polarized” I do not mean that Americans disagree about politics. That has always been the case. Since popular voting for the presidency began early in the nineteenth century, scarcely any winning candidate has received more than 60 percent of the vote, and very few losers have received less than 40 percent. Inevitably, Americans disagree about who should be in the White House.

By polarization I mean an intense commitment to a candidate, culture, or ideology that sets one group apart from people in a rival group. That commitment is revealed when a losing candidate is regarded not simply as wrong but as corrupt or wicked, when one culture is regarded as morally superior to every other one, or when one set of political beliefs is thought to be entirely correct and a rival set wholly wrong.

Polarization so defined was first used by Richard Hofstadter in his book *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*.² He meant not just partisanship or disagreement, but a belief that the other side was managed by a secret conspiracy that seemed to use devious means to obtain complete control. Today, that view might take these forms: “Liberals are controlled by a media elite, university professors, and Hollywood stars who wish to enforce a radically secular culture.” Or, “Conservatives are run by the religious Right and by big corporations who with their hired neocon advisers wanted to invade Iraq to get oil.”

FROM 2004 BACK TO 1800

Polarization is not new to this country. It is hard to imagine a nation more divided than it was in 1800, when pro-British, procommerce New

1. I am grateful for the research assistance of Bryan O’Keefe and Karlyn Bowman and for the comments of Peter B. Clark and Professors Morton Keller and John Zaller.

2. Hofstadter, *Paranoid Style* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

Englishers supported John Adams and pro-French, proagriculture southerners supported Thomas Jefferson. The passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 was one measure of this hostility; another was that in 1800, as in 2000, an extremely close election was settled by a struggle in one state (New York in 1800, Florida in 2000). The choice between Abraham Lincoln and George McClelland in 1864 symbolized another divided nation, this time over the conduct of the Civil War.

But in recent years the nation has not been so polarized. People disagreed over whether the presidency should go to Harry Truman or Thomas Dewey, Dwight Eisenhower or Adlai Stevenson, John F. Kennedy or Richard Nixon, or Nixon and Hubert Humphrey, but there was rather little venom directed at these rivals. In most elections between 1948 and (roughly) 1996, the data do not indicate that our people, though divided, detested one candidate or the people who supported him.

Now I think they do. Today, some people have said that they would move to Canada if George W. Bush won. Much of the press regularly portrays him as a dimwit. A former vice presidential candidate said that Bush had “betrayed” America by planning a war designed to benefit friends and supporters. A senior Democratic senator called the Bush administration a series of “lies, lies, and more lies” that planned a “mindless, needless, senseless, and reckless” war that amounted to a “fraud.”³ You do not hear as much about popular dislike of Senator John Kerry (and before him of President Bill Clinton), but that is because you do not live in Arkansas or Texas where many of my relatives live and where the *New York Times* is not read. In these places, Kerry is regarded as a scoundrel.⁴

In early 2005, President Bush’s approval rating was 94 percent among Republicans and only 18 percent among Democrats, the largest gap in the history of the Gallup Poll. In the 2004 presidential election, less than one-third of the voters said they had voted for Bush because they wanted to defeat Kerry, but more than two-thirds said they voted for Kerry because they wanted to defeat Bush.⁵ Many voters, mostly Democratic ones, said

3. These phrases quoted in Stephen Hayward, “Gore Goes Gaga,” *Weekly Standard*, August 18, 2003; Associated Press, “Gore Says America ‘Betrayed’ by Bush,” *USA Today*, February 8, 2004; Sen. Edward Kennedy quoted on <http://www.commondreams.org>, October 16, 2003; and Associated Press, “Kennedy Says Iraq War Case a ‘Fraud,’” September 18, 2003.

4. Some anti-Kerry rhetoric includes claims that he is “brain dead” (<http://www.rushlimbaugh.com>), that he is guilty of “pansy pacifism” (<http://www.bushcountry.org>), and that he should be charged with “treason” for having given “aid and comfort” to our enemies (<http://www.patriotpetitions.us/kerry/>).

5. William Schneider, “The Permanent Negative Campaign,” *National Journal*, March 5, 2005, 724; CNN Election Poll, November 7, 2004.

that Bush personally was the source of their ballot choice. In this regard, they are much like Europeans, who are more hostile to President Bush than to the United States as a whole.

A fair summary of the attitudes that some of us have toward some of the rest of us was stated by Dr. David Barry, a distinguished scholar whose inability to obtain tenure forced him to become a columnist for the *Miami Herald*. Red-state residents, he wrote, are “ignorant racist fascist knuckle-dragging NASCAR-obsessed cousin-marrying road-kill-eating tobacco-juice-dribbling gun-fondling religious fanatic rednecks,” whereas Blue-state residents are “godless unpatriotic pierced-nose Volvo-driving France-loving leftwing Communist latte-sucking tofu-chomping holistic-wacko neurotic vegan weenie perverts.” So there, in detached scholarly language, you have it.

I am aware that many scholars disagree with that view. To them, polarization is almost entirely confined to a small number of political elites and to members of Congress. Indeed, some have suggested that as Congress has become more polarized, the voters have increasingly turned against it because it is “too partisan.”⁶ Apparently, voters want something akin to nonpartisan politics, which is about like wanting churches without religion.

Professor Morris Fiorina has published a book the subtitle of which—*The Myth of a Polarized America*—clearly states its theme. He argues that the policy differences between voters in Red and Blue states are small and that on issues such as abortion and homosexuality most voters think pretty much alike.⁷ Much as I admire Fiorina, I take exception to some of his generalizations. First, polarization does not refer to Red (Bush) and Blue (Gore and Kerry) states. Many of these states voted only narrowly for one candidate or the other and internally are deeply divided between liberal and conservative areas. Inferring the views of individual citizens from generalizations about opinion in states is a questionable procedure.

Second, we are very deeply divided about abortion, but that split is not captured by Fiorina’s data. He examines public opinion to see which of six positions might, to the respondent, justify an abortion: the woman’s health is endangered, she became pregnant because of a rape, there is a

6. John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Congress as Public Enemy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Gary C. Jacobson, “Party Polarization in National Politics: The Electoral Connection,” in *Polarized Politics*, edited by Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2000), 9–30.

7. Fiorina, *Culture War?* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005).

strong chance of a fetal defect, the family has a low income, the woman is not married, or the woman simply wants no more children. The data he uses find that since *Roe v. Wade*, the degree to which people accept one of these reasons has not changed. I am not surprised, but I wish to point out that only about 40 percent of all Americans will support abortion for any of the last three reasons (low income, unmarried, or wants no more children), whereas more than 80 percent will support it for one of the first three reasons (health risk, rape, or fetal defect). To me, that is a deeply divided nation: almost everyone supports abortion after a disaster afflicts the mother, but less than half do so if it is a matter simply of the mother's preferences. That division—a profoundly important one—has not changed for forty years. The differences among people on this issue affect how they vote. In 2000 and again in 2004, 70 percent of those who thought abortion should always be legal voted for Al Gore or John Kerry, whereas more than 70 percent of those who thought it should always be illegal voted for George Bush.⁸

And the division is even greater on some issues other than abortion. In mid-2005, here were the divisions between Democrats and Republicans about some key questions:

Invading Iraq was the right thing to do:

Democrats 22 percent

Republicans 78 percent

Things in Iraq are going reasonably well:

Democrats 20 percent

Republicans 69 percent

It is all right to have a baby outside of marriage:

Democrats 63 percent

Republicans 42 percent

Support for stem cell research:

Democrats 72 percent

Republicans 49 percent⁹

These data create two questions: first, what may explain the growth of political polarization, and, second, why has polarization spread beyond political elites into the opinions of many ordinary Americans? I suspect that the answer to the first question can be found in the changing politics

8. *Ibid.*, 37; CNN Exit Poll, 2000; National Election Pool Exit Poll, 2004.

9. CBS/*New York Times*; Gallup Poll (both in 2005).

of Congress, the new competitiveness of the mass media, and the rise of new interest groups, and the answer to the second in part in the increasing numbers of individuals obtaining higher education.

CONGRESS

No one, I think, denies that Congress is polarized. When the House voted in 1998 to impeach President Clinton, all but four Republicans voted for at least one impeachment article, and only five Democrats voted for even one of them. In the Senate, every Democrat voted for acquittal, and 91 percent of the Republicans voted to convict on at least one article.¹⁰

The impeachment issue was not an isolated case. In 1993 President Clinton's budget passed the House and Senate without a single Republican vote for it in either chamber. This deep party split also occurred over taxes (in the Senate, Vice President Gore had to cast the deciding vote) and supplemental appropriations. Since 1950 there has been a steady increase in the percentage of votes in Congress that pit a majority of Democrats against a majority of Republicans.¹¹

Political parties in Congress were once coalitions of dissimilar forces: liberal northern Democrats and conservative southern ones, liberal coastal Republicans and conservative midwestern ones. No more; the realignment of the South (it is overwhelmingly Republican) and New England (it is strongly Democratic) has all but eliminated legislators who deviate from each party's leadership. Conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans are endangered species now approaching extinction.

If you measure the ideological orientation of members of the House, you learn that whereas in the 1970s there was a large overlap between Democrats and Republicans, today that congruence has almost disappeared. By the late 1990s virtually every Democrat was more liberal than virtually every Republican.¹²

The result was not only intense partisanship but also a sharp increase in congressional incivility. In 1995 a Republican-controlled Senate passed a budget that President Clinton vetoed. Because of the standoff, many

10. Jacobson, "Party Polarization in National Politics," 9–30.

11. Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 2003–2004* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2003), 215, 217. See also Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal, *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll Call Voting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7–10, 46, 129.

12. Jacobson, "Party Polarization," 12–13. See also David C. King, "Congress, Polarization, and Fidelity to the Median Voter," unpublished paper, J. F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 22.

federal agencies had to shut down, a move that backfired on the Republicans.

No one who listens to congressional debates can doubt that heated words are frequently exchanged, but the only real measure of the extent of incivility is the number of times that a representative's words are either ruled to be out of order or are "taken down," that is, written by the clerk and then read aloud to the House with the offending member being asked if he or she wishes to withdraw them. From 1953 to the early 1990s, hardly any words were ruled out of order or were taken down, but between 1995 and 1997 there was a sharp upward turn in both measures.¹³

But incivility, like partisan polarization, is not new to Congress. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, members of Congress not only made the most scandalous remarks about one another but also on occasion hit their rivals with canes or fists. And polarization was often intense, as when the Congress was deeply divided before the Civil War about slavery and after that war about Reconstruction.

One is tempted to suggest that congressional polarization is aided by districting arrangements that make each House seat safe for either a Democratic or a Republican incumbent. If only these seats were truly competitive, one might argue, then more centrist legislators would be elected. That seems plausible, but David C. King has shown that it is wrong: in the House, the more competitive the district, the more extreme the views of the winner. This odd result apparently is the consequence of party activists dominating the nomination process in party primaries. In those primary races, turnout is low (and apparently getting lower), so ideologically motivated activists tend to have a lot of influence.¹⁴

MASS MEDIA

The mass media are increasingly polarized. The public not only believes this but also acts on that belief. Far fewer people now subscribe to newspapers or watch the network evening news. Some of this decline may be explained by the public's preference for entertainment over news, but some, I think, reflects the growing belief that the press does not generally tell the truth, or at least all of it. Part of this suspicion that the media are more biased comes, as I shall point out, from an increase in business competition. And some of it comes from the sharper antagonism among

13. Katherine Hall Jamieson and Erika Falk, "Continuity and Change in Civility in the House," in *Polarized Politics*, edited by Bond and Fleisher, 106.

14. King, "Congress, Polarization, and Fidelity," 26-34.

political leaders and their associated advisers. As one journalist put it, “We don’t deal in facts, but in attributed opinions”—or these days, unattributed opinions. And those opinions are more intensely competitive than once was the case.

Supplying those opinions has become a big business. In the 1950s, television news was a brief and not very profitable venture by three networks. The Huntley-Brinkley news programs lasted thirty minutes; for the rest of the time, the tube supplied us with westerns and situation comedies. Today, television news is a vast, growing, and very profitable venture by many broadcast and cable outlets that supply news for us twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

That news is not only more omnipresent but also more adversarial. When there were only three television networks and radio stations were forbidden by the Fairness Doctrine from broadcasting controversial views, the media gravitated toward the middle of the ideological spectrum where the large markets could be found. But technology has created cable news and the Internet, and the Fairness Doctrine has, by and large, been repealed, so now many media outlets find their markets at the ideological extremes. The media, like Congress, have business as well as ideological reasons for contributing to polarization. Broadcasters are eager for stories to fill up their round-the-clock schedules and reluctant to trust the government as a source for those stories. Many media outlets are clearly liberal in their orientation; with the arrival of Fox News and the growth of talk radio, many are just as clearly conservative.¹⁵

The evidence that the media display a political bias is very strong. The major broadcast networks and the many big-city newspapers are liberal;¹⁶ Fox News and most radio talk shows are avowedly conservative. The Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) has been systematically studying television broadcasts for a quarter century. In the 2004 election campaign, John Kerry got more favorable mentions than any presidential candidate in CMPA’s history, especially during October. This is not new. Since 1980,

15. The conservatism of most radio talk show hosts is explained in William G. Mayer, “Why Talk Radio Is Conservative,” *Public Interest*, no. 156 (Summer 2004): 86–103.

16. The studies supporting this contention include S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman, and Linda S. Lichter, *The Media Elite* (Bethesda, Md.: Adler and Adler, 1986); Stanley Rothman and Amy Black, “Elites Revisited: American Social and Political Leadership in the 1990s,” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 11 (1999): 169–95; John R. Lott Jr. and Kevin A. Hassett, “Is Newspaper Coverage of Economic Events Biased?” unpublished paper, American Enterprise Institute (September 1, 2004); and Tim Groseclose and Jeff Mylo, “A Measure of Media Bias,” unpublished paper, Department of Political Science, UCLA (September 2003).

the Democratic candidate has received more favorable mentions than the Republican one in four races (those with Kerry, Clinton, and Mondale), whereas the Republican candidate has received better press in one contest (the 1988 race involving George H. W. Bush). The one exception was Fox News: it was much more critical of Kerry than of Bush. A clear political orientation exists among weekly newsmagazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*.¹⁷

Talk radio is listened to by about one-sixth of the adult public, and these people are mostly conservatives. National Public Radio (NPR) has an audience of about the same size, and its members are disproportionately liberal.¹⁸ And within these broad groups, particular programs are especially distinctive. Nearly three-fourths of those who listen to Rush Limbaugh and more than half of those who watch the *O'Reilly Factor* are conservative.¹⁹ Those who watch CNN or CBS or listen to NPR are more likely to be Democrats than Republicans.²⁰

The people who watch cable news have become more polarized in the past four years. In 2000 about the same percentage of Democrats and Republicans watched Fox News; by 2004, the percentage who were Republican had doubled, whereas the percentage who were Democratic remained unchanged. Democrats and Republicans disagree over the credibility of various news outlets. Twice as many Democrats as Republicans believe all or most of what they hear from ABC, CBS, NBC, National Public Radio, and the *New York Times*, while more Republicans than Democrats believe what they see on Fox News. (The news outlet that has essentially no partisan differences in credibility is CSPAN.)²¹

The Internet has become an important source of news, but it is primarily consumed by college graduates. And the people who use the Internet are very likely to be interested in what journalists call "hard news," that is, politics, business, and finance. The same interest in hard news is offered by people who listen to Rush Limbaugh or Jim Lehrer's *News Hour*.²²

At one time our culture was only weakly affected by the media because the media had only a few brief points of access to us and were moderate

17. Center for Media and Public Affairs, press releases, September 9, November 1, 2004.

18. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "News Audiences Increasingly Polarized," press release, June 8, 2004.

19. *Ibid.*, "Public's News Habits," June 9, 2002.

20. *Ibid.*, "News Audiences Increasingly Polarized," June 8, 2004.

21. *Ibid.*, 1–2.

22. *Ibid.*, 17, 28.

and audience-maximizing organizations. Today, the media have many lines of access, and they reflect the maximization of controversy and the cultivation of niche markets. Once the media talked to us; now they shout at us.

INTEREST GROUPS

At one time the major interest groups in this country were those concerned with material interests. The National Association of Manufacturers, Chamber of Commerce, American Federation of Labor, and Congress of Industrial Organizations struggled over economic issues. These groups are still active, but the messages that people hear today come from very different groups. These organizations are interested in social and cultural issues such as civil rights, managing the environment, alternatives to public schools, the role of women, and access to firearms. These postmodern issues now provide important cues to the public about how they should view politics.

Interest groups that are divided by material issues can readily find ways to reach compromise solutions, but those divided by issues of rights or morality find compromise very difficult. The views of many interest groups, or at least of their supporters, profoundly affect how candidates for office are selected. It is hard to imagine someone who opposes abortion receiving the Democratic nomination for president or someone who favors it receiving the Republican nomination.

Interest groups can contribute to and then benefit from important court decisions that shape political debate outside the realm of voter preferences. *Roe v. Wade* made abortion a controversial issue, not because the American people were hopelessly polarized about the matter but because their centrist views played no role in determining the policy. The policy reflected instead how Supreme Court justices defined "rights." Similarly, when conservative justices restricted the ability of the federal government to regulate the use of guns near schools, the controversy that ensued reflected not the public's views but those of justices concerned about federalism.

POLITICAL ELITES AND PUBLIC OPINION

Polarization has increased, but it is not obvious why it has spread to so many rank-and-file voters. It would not be hard to imagine that extremist politics is confined to the chattering classes. But I think it has spread well beyond those elite precincts. My view reflects my difficulty in imaging

that the key political institutions—Congress, the media, and interest groups—operate in an ideological vacuum. If we wish to think that the public is not polarized, we must imagine that the actions of Congress, the media, and certain interest groups have no effect on people. I find that assumption implausible.

In an important book on public opinion, Professor John R. Zaller has argued that elite opinion does affect mass opinion. He finds evidence that on various issues, what the public thinks is shaped to an important degree by what political elites think. His examples include beliefs about homosexuality, a nuclear freeze, the war in Vietnam, and the war to expel Iraq from Kuwait. He suggests that these beliefs are most important not for the average citizen but for the citizens who are politically aware. By “political awareness,” Zaller means that these citizens do well on answering neutral factual questions about politics.²³

The Persian Gulf War provides an especially compelling example. Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. From then through the congressional elections in November of that year, there were hardly any elite criticisms of what the United States might do. Two days after the election, however, President George H. W. Bush announced that he was sending many more troops to the Persian Gulf. This decision stimulated strong criticism among some members of Congress, especially Democrats. Happily, a major public opinion survey was under way just when these events occurred. The pollsters had interviewed 250 people before congressional criticism began and the rest after it was under way. Before the criticism was heard, Democratic and Republican citizens supported Bush’s plan to aid Kuwait, and the degree of that support increased the more politically aware they were. But after the election and the beginning of elite criticism, the support of Republican voters went up and Democratic support flattened out, with the increase (among Republicans) being greater among those who were most politically aware. As President Bush became more vigorous, politically aware voters began to differ sharply. Democratic support for the war declined, and Republican support increased.²⁴

Much the same thing can be learned about popular attitudes regarding busing to increase school integration, the government guaranteeing jobs to people, and beliefs about the war in Vietnam. As political awareness increases, the attitudes of liberals and conservatives split apart, with highly aware liberals favoring busing and job guarantees and opposing the war in

23. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99, 104, 110, 269–75, 316–22, 21–22, 43, 335.

24. *Ibid.*, 103–7.

Vietnam and highly aware conservatives opposing busing and job guarantees and supporting the war in Vietnam.²⁵

To me, it is clear that elite opinions can affect how people think. But that leaves two questions unsettled: on what issues does this elite effect occur, and how deeply does it penetrate the public? As to what issues, I am struck by the fact that on most of the matters Zaller investigated, such as homosexuality, a nuclear winter, the war in Kuwait, the war in Vietnam, and federal job guarantees, average citizens, even the well-informed ones, had little personal experience. They were not homosexual, did not fight in wars, and could only imagine what a nuclear freeze might be. Their minds were of necessity open to influence. Matters might have been very different if elites had tried to tell the public what to think about crime, inflation, drug abuse, or their local schools, matters on which most Americans think themselves to be well informed.

We do not know how many people are affected by elite views, but my suspicion is that the number is growing. Politically aware people are more likely to be well-educated people, and the level of formal schooling in this country has been going up.²⁶ And politically aware people are more likely to pay attention to the mass media.

Our attitudes toward homosexuality provide a good example. For many decades it was regarded as a sickness. That was even the view of the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Homosexuals were regarded at worst as menacing deviants and at best as ill patients. Then the APA changed its position and announced in 1974 that homosexuality was not a sickness but a preference. Almost immediately, the mainstream press began describing homosexuality not as a vice but as a problem worthy of a civil-rights strategy.²⁷ The public began to follow suit. Though most opposed legalizing gay marriage, there was a sharp decline in personal hostility to homosexuals.

The strength of our differences over political matters is probably best assessed by looking not at contemporary issues but at enduring political values and personal partisanship. In 2004, 89 percent of Republicans but only 12 percent of Democrats approved of President George W. Bush. At an earlier time, by contrast, three to four times as many Democrats approved of Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, and Dwight Eisenhower as approved of Bush in 2004. In about twenty years, party affiliation had come to dominate what people think about the president.

25. *Ibid.*, 107–10.

26. *Ibid.*, 98–99.

27. *Ibid.*, 316–19.

In 2004 a quarter of the population was angry about the Bush administration; virtually every one of them voted for Kerry.²⁸

The same change can be found in the public's views about the use of military power. Since the late 1980s, Republicans have been more willing than Democrats to say that "the best way to ensure peace is through military strength." By the late 1990s and on into 2003, well over two-thirds of all Republicans agreed with that view, while far less than half of all Democrats did. About four out of every ten conservative Republicans believe that preemptive attacks on enemies are often justified, while fewer than one in ten liberal Democrats agrees. In 2005, three-fourths of all Democrats but less than one-third of all Republicans told pollsters that good diplomacy is the best way to ensure peace. In the same survey, one-fourth of all Democrats but two-thirds of all Republicans said they would fight for this country "whether it is right or wrong."²⁹

These differences between self-described Democrats and Republicans or between self-described liberals and conservatives suggest that polarization may be occurring chiefly among people who take politics and ideology seriously. Some recent studies support this view. Professor Marc J. Hetherington found evidence in public opinion polls that voters were aware of how different the congressional parties had become; unlike in earlier years, the parties were no longer seen as Tweedledee and Tweedledum. As the parties have increased their ideological differences, attentive voters have increased their ideological polarization. They now like either the Democrats or the Republicans more than they once did and are less likely to feel neutral toward either one. And the voters who were most likely to pick up these ideological cues were the college-educated ones. As Hetherington put it, "People with the greatest ability to assimilate new information, those with more formal education, are most affected by elite polarization." Hetherington's conclusions have been criticized by another scholar, but he finds that even using a more subtle analysis, "party elite polarization does enhance public perceptions of inter-party differences."³⁰

28. Gallup Poll, "Bush Ratings Show Historical Levels of Polarization," June 4, 2004; CNN Exit Poll, 2004.

29. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "The 2004 Political Landscape: Evenly Divided and Increasingly Polarized," press release, November 5, 2003; *ibid.*, "Politics and Values in a 51%-48% Nation," January 24, 2005.

30. Hetherington, "Resurgent Mass Partisanship: The Role of Elite Polarization," *American Political Science Review* 95 (September 2001): 628; Jeffrey D. Grynawski, "Elite Polarization and Public Perceptions of Party," unpublished paper, Department of Political Science, University of Chicago (June 17, 2004).

How deep might this polarization reach? We do not know the complete answer, but here are some clues. The gap, measured by opinion polls, between Democrats and Republicans was twice as great in 2004 as it had been in 1972. In fact, rank-and-file Americans disagree more strongly today than did politically active Americans in 1972. What was once elite disagreement has broadened to encompass mass disagreement. To be sure, that mass polarization involves only a minority of all voters, but that minority is sizable. And if you look at people who are more active politically than simply voting, the gap is even wider. These activists are not a tiny part of the population; they make up about one-quarter of all the people in the country.³¹ Activist polarization is chiefly directed at the issues that have been raised by social and religious conservatives, such as abortion, sexuality, gay marriage, divorce law, and school prayer. The more you identify with a political party or an ideological label, the more likely you are to take positions that put you systematically at odds with people who identify with a different party or ideology.³² Politics has become in large measure a matter of responding to cues.

EDUCATION AND POLARIZATION

These cues are best known by people who think a lot about politics. I am not confident who they are, but there is evidence that people with more schooling make up a significant part of that group. In 1900, only 10 percent of all young Americans went to high school. My father, like many men his age in the early twentieth century, dropped out of school after the eighth grade. Today, 84 percent of adult Americans have graduated from high school, and nearly 27 percent have graduated from college. Even when I graduated from college, the first in my family to do so, less than one-tenth of all Americans over age twenty-five had gone that far. Today, more than one-fourth are college graduates. In 1900 American high schools produced fewer than 100,000 graduates; in 2001 they graduated more than 2.5 million people, and universities produced more than 40,000 Ph.D.s. This extraordinary growth in schooling has produced a large and growing audience for political cues.

Postgraduate education is one of the great dividing lines. What little data we have on the views of people who have gone beyond the four-year

31. Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders, "Why Can't We All Just Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized America," *Forum* 3 (2005): 5-7.

32. John Evans, "Have Americans' Attitudes Become More Polarized?" unpublished paper, Center for Arts and Cultural Studies, Princeton University (Spring 2002).

college degree suggest that they are very different from those who stopped with a high school or college diploma. About one out of every six voters described themselves as liberals, but well over one out of every four people with postgraduate degrees are liberals. In mid-2004, about one-half of all voters trusted George Bush, but less than a third of those with postgraduate education did. Whereas more than half of all college graduates voted for Bush in 2004, well over half of all people who had done postgraduate work voted for Kerry. Consider people who have had any postgraduate training or a postgraduate degree: only one-tenth of all Americans do, but within that one-tenth, more than half supported the antiwar candidacy of Howard Dean.³³ If one deleted from the ranks of people with postgraduate degrees those who have an MBA or an engineering degree and looked only at those who studied the social sciences or the humanities, that gap would be, I suspect, much wider.

The effect of postgraduate education is reinforced by that of being in a profession. Between 1900 and 1960, write John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, people in the professions voted much as did business managers, but by 1988 professionals began supporting Democrats while managers supported Republicans. Judis and Teixeira speculate that this is because professionals, such as teachers, nurses, and software designers, identify more with their knowledge than with the enterprise of which they are a part.³⁴

The effect of postgraduate education seems to outweigh the effect of wealth. For voters up through college graduates, having higher incomes means becoming more conservative. But once one has a postgraduate education, that wealth effect vanishes.

The results of this linkage among ideology, interest-group demands, congressional polarization, and media influence are easily read in the commentary surrounding the 2004 election. A conservative accused John Kerry of being “brain-dead,” and another said that liberals had “gone quite around the twist” by publishing books and articles that denigrated the president.³⁵ Various liberals said that the country was seized by “religious intolerance” that was bent on “rewriting the Constitution” after a campaign of “vicious personal attacks” that have befuddled “58 million” Americans who are the victims of “ignorance” in which a “great nation was

33. NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* survey, July 19–21, 2004; CNN Exit Poll, 2004; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “The Dean Activists,” press release, April 6, 2005.

34. Judis and Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 39–49.

35. Rush Limbaugh, radio; Charles Krauthammer, *Washington Post*, August 27, 2004.

felled by a poisonous nut.”³⁶ If these remarks are not the sign of polarization, then the word has no meaning. To a degree that we cannot precisely measure and over issues that we cannot exactly list, polarization has seeped down into the public.

This fact may recall to your mind the culture wars of which James Davison Hunter has written. He defined culture conflict as “political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding.” This conflict is found, he suggested, within and not simply among different religious views and involves “fundamental ideas about who we are as Americans.”³⁷ To him, this war is chiefly between people who have either orthodox or progressive ideas about moral authority. For the orthodox, there are external, definable, and transcendent sources for that authority, whereas for the progressives moral authority derives from a spirit of rationalism and subjectivism based on the prevailing assumptions of modern life. In my next lecture I will suggest that this cleavage is even greater between secular and religious Americans.

Hunter takes note of the political effect of these moral differences, but most of his book emphasizes the rhetorical differences. The progressive view goes back many decades, at least to the time when Robert Ingersoll in the nineteenth century attacked traditional religion because it had “imprisoned the human mind” and become “the enemy of liberty” that had “robbed us of every right.” But Ingersoll was a slouch compared to Sinclair Lewis when he created the odious preacher Elmer Gantry or to H. L. Mencken who called fundamentalists “yokels,” “half-wits,” “hillbillies,” “morons,” and “gaping primates.”³⁸ One can only imagine what Mencken would have said about the 2004 election.

These criticisms were stilled by the Depression and the Second World War. Those momentous events created the so-called Roosevelt Coalition of Jews, southern blacks, union members, urban Catholics, and public intellectuals. That coalition endorsed an active military, supported an aggressive foreign policy, and embraced religious views. After the war it supported nuclear power. Today, however, it is skeptical of the military, hostile to an aggressive foreign policy, opposed to nuclear power, and critical of religion. In the 1970s, A. Bartlett Giamatti, then president of Yale,

36. Garry Wills, *New York Times*, November 4, 2004; Tom Friedman, *New York Times*, November 4, 2004; E. J. Dionne, *Washington Post*, November 5, 2004; Jane Smiley, *Slate*, November 4, 2004; Michael Moore, November 5, 2004.

37. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 42.

38. *Ibid.*, 140, 141.

told the entering freshman class that the “religious right,” as it had then become known, was composed of “authoritarian[s]” who were “peddlers of coercion.”³⁹

The Republican Party in the 1930s was isolationist, anti-Catholic, and dedicated to the separation of church and state and supported nationalism over states’ rights. Today, however, it is the party that backs the military, supports an activist foreign policy, believes in states’ rights, endorses nuclear power, and calls for churches to be more active in public affairs. Many Republicans denounce “secular humanism”—this from the party of which Robert Ingersoll, a prominent nineteenth-century atheist, was once a notable member.⁴⁰

The easily ridiculed Bible thumper has been replaced by the religiously engaged social critic, an interesting development, though one not yet grasped by progressive critics who continue to speak about the latter as if he or she were the former.

To some degree Hunter is correct. There is a culture war here, though that struggle is, I think, but a part of the ideological polarization that has gripped much of the nation. Part of conservative thought on political issues has religious roots, but part of it is as secular in origin as anything found on the Left. Some of the liberal attack on conservatives comes from people who have an explicit religious tradition (they may be liberal Protestants or Catholics or reformed Jews), but some of it has the same wholly secular roots that one finds among many conservatives.

THE COSTS OF POLARIZATION

For some people, polarized politics is a good thing because it encourages sharp debate on important public issues. What could be wrong, they ask, about having clearly opposed parties arguing publicly about things that matter to Americans?

But for me, polarization is a problem. First, I suspect that polarization induces the public to think that political disagreement prevents government leaders from working toward shared goals. As a result, people will distrust the politicians. That distrust will lead not to more useful compromises but to further alienation from politics. The sharp decline that has occurred since the early 1950s in popular approval of our national officials no doubt has many causes. But one of these, I suspect, is that ordinary voters agree more than political elites agree, and these elites are far more

39. *Ibid.*, 144, 148.

40. This paragraph is adapted from Morton Keller, *America’s Regimes* (forthcoming).

numerous now than once was the case. Elite disagreement means that in primary contests, activists will tend to pick candidates who are ideologically distant from one another. We shall have achieved what a committee of the American Political Science Association once argued for in the 1950s: a “responsible” two-party system.

The political science committee that endorsed “responsible” parties gave expression to the envy its authors had for the more ideological and coherent two-party system of Great Britain. But when that report appeared in the 1950s, hardly anyone thought our parties could be transformed into something resembling the British model. Democrats and Republicans would continue, they supposed, to display what George Wallace later denounced: there was, he said, “not a dime’s worth of difference” between “Tweedledum and Tweedledee.” But what Wallace forgot was that, however alike the two parties were, the public liked them that way. As the parties have become more different, popular confidence in the federal government has declined. I much prefer an admired and effective two-party system. A half century ago, Tweedledum and Tweedledee enjoyed the support of the American people; today, the parties do not enjoy such broad support.

The second problem with polarization is, to me, far more profound. Sharpened debate may be helpful with respect to domestic issues but not, I think, for the management of important foreign military matters. The United States, now an unrivaled superpower with important responsibilities for protecting peace and defeating terrorists, must discharge those duties with its own political house in disarray. We fought the Second World War as a united nation even against enemies, Germany and Italy, that had not attacked us. We began the wars in Korea and Vietnam with some degree of unity, but that soon collapsed. We expelled Iraq from Kuwait over the objections of many congressional critics, and we later defeated Saddam Hussein despite the criticisms of many domestic leaders. And when stabilizing Iraq and helping that country create a new, free government, we did so in the face of intense and mounting criticism, much of it coming from leaders who before the war had agreed that Hussein was an evil menace who, in their opinion, had weapons of mass destruction.

Denmark or Luxembourg can display domestic anguish over its military policies, but the United States cannot. A divided America will encourage our enemies and dishearten our allies. What General Giap, our opponent in Vietnam, said of us then is even more true today: America cannot be defeated on the battlefield, but it can be defeated at home.

II. RELIGION AND POLARIZATION

Religion may be one of the most important sources of polarization in American politics.¹ Though deep political divisions occur among both religious and secular people, the split between the religious and the secular is large and has grown. In 2004, white voters who attended religious services at least weekly were three times as likely as those who seldom or never went to church to oppose abortion and twice as likely to object to gay marriage and to describe themselves as conservative. Among whites, religious identification is more closely associated with the presidential vote than is age, sex, income, or education.²

The importance of religion was emphasized by editorial comment after the 2004 election. A series of angry statements accused President Bush of having led a “jihad” against the American people by attempting to found a “theocratic” state in which “Christian fundamentalists” would use their “religious energy to promote divisions and intolerance at home and abroad.”³ Pundits eagerly looked for evidence that the election was settled by voters who had embraced “moral values,” presumably the wrong ones.

Following the election, we heard another round of disagreements about what many thought was a religious issue. Many defenders of Terri Schiavo accused those who wished to let her die of being godless murderers; many who supported the withdrawal of her feeding tube charged that her supporters were radical fundamentalists who sought a theocratic state.⁴

THE HISTORICAL LEGACY OF RELIGION

Religion has always played an important role in American culture and at times has been the source of deep political divisions. One does not have to be a close student of American history to recall that religion has animated

1. I am grateful for financial aid from the Earhart Foundation, the research assistance of Bryan O’Keefe and Karlyn Bowman, and the comments from Peter B. Clark, John DiIulio, Roger Finke, Morton Keller, and Jon A. Shields.

2. Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders, “Why Can’t We All Just Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized America,” *Forum* 3 (2005): 15–16.

3. These comments were written by Maureen Dowd, Sidney Blumenthal, Robert Kuttner, and Thomas Friedman. A convenient summary can be found in Ramesh Ponnuru, “Secularism and Its Discontents,” *National Review*, December 27, 2004, 32–35. These views are not simply those of pundits. For an uncommonly silly book that expresses these views, see Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (New York: Norton, 2004).

4. For the Left: Maureen Dowd, “DeLay, Deny, and Demagogue,” *New York Times*, March 24, 2005. For the Right: Randall Terry, invited by Terri Schiavo’s parents to organize protests on her behalf, once said that “our goal is a Christian nation. . . . [W]e are called by God to conquer this country. . . . Theocracy means God rules” (*Fort Wayne (Ind.) News Sentinel*, August 16, 1993).

both worrisome and desirable causes. Religious differences animated the objections of the Know-Nothing Party to the presence of American Catholics, but they also supplied the moral outrage against the ownership of human beings. The civil rights movement was led by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., and his appeal was essentially religious in nature. Southern white Protestant churches, though they had long been a part of a segregated society, did not resist King's claims. Though many churches were passive or silent, some, such as the Southern Baptists and southern Presbyterians, publicly supported desegregation.⁵ And those who opposed the war in Vietnam rarely, if ever, complained that the Reverend William Sloane Coffin appealed to God to argue against American involvement there.⁶

Historian David Chappell argues that many leaders of American liberalism during the 1940s and 1950s worried that their cause, based on a reasoned commitment to social improvement, was in danger of languishing because it lacked a moral fervor sufficient to keep intact a coalition of blacks, union workers, big-city bosses, southern whites, and northern intellectuals. The New Deal coalition, he contends, consisted of "hungry liberals" who sensed that "something was missing." John Dewey, in the 1920s, argued that liberalism needed a "religious belief" that was devoid of any connection to actual religions. That belief was important, he wrote, because "liberals are notoriously hard to organize," whereas conservatives had a "natural bond of cohesion based on habit, tradition, and fear of the unknown."⁷ Dewey never made it quite clear just exactly how one creates a religious belief without being religious.

Later, Lionel Trilling took up the same argument. Liberalism in the early 1950s, he wrote, was "the sole intellectual tradition in American politics," but that tradition, important as it is, was trying to organize the world in a rational way, thereby leading it to drift "toward a denial of the emotions and the imagination."⁸

The civil rights movement put a brief end to these worries because religion helped galvanize the most important social movement of the twentieth century. And when Jimmy Carter ran for the presidency in 1976, he

5. Wilfred McClay, "The Church of Civil Rights," *Commentary* (June 2004): 45; David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), chap. 6.

6. On these matters, see Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), esp. 49, 59–60, 227–28.

7. Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, chap. 1, 13–14 (Dewey quote).

8. Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953), 9.

brought to his candidacy the support of many evangelicals. In that year, only about one-third of all self-identified white evangelicals described themselves as Republicans (even though about half voted for Gerald Ford). Carter, and then Clinton after him, carried several southern states with some evangelical help. By 1996, however, matters had changed. By then, white Protestant evangelicals had become much more conservative, more Republican in party identification, and more likely to vote for the Republican presidential candidate. In 1976, these voters made up only one-sixth of all Republican supporters; by 1996, they made up one-third of that support.⁹

RELIGION AND PUBLIC OPINION

One interpretation of the current furor over religion in American politics is that secular liberals embrace religion when it supports civil rights and gives aid to Democratic candidates and denounce it when it opposes abortion and backs Republican candidates. But this view is uncharitable, because there are many religious liberals just as there are many nonreligious conservatives; the votes of each group often depend on matters having little to do with faith.

Americans are divided in their religious activities. Though the great majority believe in God and life after death, secularists (by which I mean people for whom religion plays no role in their lives whether or not they believe in God or an afterlife) are rising in number. They tend to live in big cities on the Pacific Coast or in the Northeast and to have been much more likely to vote for Al Gore in 2000 and for John Kerry in 2004.¹⁰ Religion is not a trivial factor in presidential elections. America's secular voters tend to live in Blue counties, whereas America's religious ones live in Red ones.

In 2004, nearly two-thirds of the people who said they attended church more than weekly voted for Bush, and only one-third voted for Kerry. But these voters make up only one-sixth of the electorate. Of the voters who said they never attend church, two-thirds voted for Kerry and only one-third for Bush, but these voters make up only one-seventh of the electorate. And between 2000 and 2004, Bush gained support among people who said they attended church rarely or never. In short, religion makes a difference, but very religious and very irreligious voters are only a minor-

9. John C. Green et al., "Bringing in the Sheaves: The Christian Right and White Protestants, 1976-1996," in *Sojourners in the Wilderness*, edited by Corwin E. Smidt and James M. Penning (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), 80.

10. *Ibid.*, 94, 197.

ity of the electorate. And the number of voters who said that moral values (whatever that may mean) were the most important issue for them was lower in 2004 than it had been in 1996 and 2000. In 2004, terrorism and Iraq were the most important issues to most people. People who were concerned about terrorism generally voted for Bush; those concerned about Iraq mostly voted for Kerry. And the former outnumbered the latter.¹¹

Traditional evangelical Protestants made up more than one-fourth of all the voters who supported Bush. If you add to that share the votes of traditionalist Catholics and Protestants and other evangelicals, you account for more than one-half of his vote. Atheists, agnostics, and secularists made up one-sixth of all of the supporters of Kerry, and if you add to that the votes of Jews and black Protestants, you get almost half of Kerry's vote. Between 2000 and 2004, Bush gained support among traditional religious groups, while the Democratic candidate gained support among modernist religious groups, atheists, and agnostics.¹²

RELIGION ABROAD

Religion makes a difference here and helps explain the polarization of the American electorate. This is in sharp contrast to Europe, where religion has almost ceased to have any cultural or political role at all, especially in the North. In 1998, the proportion of people attending religious services once a week or more often was 5 percent in France, 4 percent in England and Denmark, and comparably low levels in other Protestant nations. Even in Catholic Italy and Spain, no more than a third of all adults frequently attended church. Only in Ireland and Poland is church attendance high, involving about two-thirds of the people.¹³ After the Second World War, religious affiliation was probably more important than social class in explaining why French and German voters supported either Catholic or socialist parties, but by the 1980s politics had lost most of its religious basis.¹⁴ By contrast, frequent religious attendance in the United States is

11. CNN Exit Poll, 2004; Public Opinion Strategies, Internet, 2004; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Religion and the Presidential Vote," press release, December 6, 2004.

12. John C. Green, et al., "The American Religious Landscape and the 2004 Presidential Vote: Increased Polarization," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (February 3, 2005).

13. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 72.

14. Richard Rose and Derek Unwin, "Social Cohesion, Political Parties, and Strains in Regimes," *Comparative Political Studies* 2 (1969): 7–67; Arend Lijphart, "Religious vs. Linguistic vs. Class Voting," *American Political Science Review* 73 (1979): 442–58; Russell J. Dalton, *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, and France* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1988), 161–69.

about the same today as it was in 1981 and involves, by some contested estimates, nearly half the population.¹⁵ Moreover, a much higher percentage of Americans pray than is true in any European nation except, again, Ireland.¹⁶

Though there has been a growth in the proportion of nonreligious or secular voters in the United States, that growth is nothing like what has occurred in most of Europe. This difference requires one to address the secularization theory. As originally stated, it argues that modernization, by which is meant the growth of rational and instrumental inquiry, leads to a decline in the social significance of religion. Modernization means the growth of institutions that manage education and welfare, a decline in the fraction of people living in small communities, and a sharp increase in scientific thought. These forces, as made clear by countless writers, including John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber, lead to a subordination of religious thought. If factories teach technical skills, if public schools provide nondenominational education, if health and welfare agencies care for the sick and the deprived, if people live mixed together in large cities that display the benefits of a consumer society, and if science seeks only naturalistic explanations for everything from the nature of life to the origins of the cosmos, what can religion possibly offer?

But modernity is affecting almost all of the world, yet religious belief, outside of Europe, seems hardly to have diminished. And the United States, perhaps the most modern society in the world, is filled with people who believe in God, go to church or synagogue, and pray to the Almighty. The secularization theory may be in some trouble.

And not only in the United States. There has been a rapid growth in Protestant religions in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. Comprehensive data comparing countries outside of Europe and North America are lacking, but the best available evidence suggests that there has been a rapid growth in Protestant, and especially Pentecostal, churches in much of the world. In Brazil, there are more Protestant pastors than Catholic priests. There have been similar growths in Chile and Guatemala. In South Korea, the number of Protestant churches is increasing five times faster than the Korean population.¹⁷

15. But as Norris and Inglehart point out in *Sacred and Secular*, other studies suggest that actual church attendance in the United States is lower than these figures imply.

16. *Ibid.*, 85.

17. See David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 49–55, 145, 157; and Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2–3, 56–59.

This is certainly the view of Professor Peter Berger, who has recanted his earlier view that modernity would produce secular societies.¹⁸ To him and to some other scholars, we are seeing as much growth as decline in religion around the world, and much of this growth is occurring not in old villages but in big cities, and not simply in backward nations such as Guatemala but in industrialized ones such as South Korea.

There are two views one can take on this matter. One is that America is the exceptional state, modern without being secular, whereas Europe shows the powerfully secular effects of modernization. The other is that Europe is the exception, while America, North and South, and much of Asia are responding to modernity without abandoning religion.

To me, the most interesting question is why America is more religious than Europe, and especially England. After all, England settled the American colonies with people who were, in most cases, deeply religious. Both countries were among the first to practice representative government, and both celebrated individual rights; indeed, as I and others have argued elsewhere, England invented individualism.¹⁹ Despite individualism, religious activities were alike in both countries up to about a hundred years ago. In the second half of the nineteenth century, scholars have estimated that about half the adult English population was in church on Sunday, and something like that fraction was true of the United States.²⁰ In 1860, one-fifth of all of the adult males in New York City served on the boards of Protestant organizations, and about half of all adult Protestant males were members of at least one church-related voluntary association.²¹ In the late 1820s, more than 40 percent of young children in New York City and about half of those in England attended Sunday schools.²²

America and England were alike in the nineteenth century but by the middle of the twentieth had become completely different. The United

18. Berger's explanation and defense of secularization are in his book *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), chap 5; his recantation is in "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World*, edited by Berger (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999), chap. 1.

19. James Q. Wilson, *The Marriage Problem* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), chap. 4; Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

20. Steve Bruce, "The Strange Death of Protestant Britain," in *Rethinking Ethnicity*, edited by Eric P. Kaufmann (London: Routledge, 2004), 121.

21. Gregory H. Singleton, "Protestant Voluntary Organizations and the Shaping of Victorian America," in *Victorian America*, edited by Daniel Walker Howe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 49–50.

22. Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and the Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 41; Thomas W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 44; Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), 161–62.

States continued to be a nation of churchgoers, while England stopped being one. Today, half of American adults go to church, but less than one-twentieth of English adults do.²³

THE PERSISTENCE OF RELIGION IN AMERICA

There is no single or simple explanation for America and England becoming so religiously different. One possibility is that the United States was settled by millions of immigrants who brought their religion with them, but that can be only part of the story.²⁴ Churchgoing is especially strong today in countries with relatively few immigrants. Moreover, the great increase in American religiosity occurred long before the Irish and Italians arrived in large numbers. Professors Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, reanalyzing data first published in the 1930s, estimate that there was a dramatic growth in church congregations and membership between 1776 and 1850, long before European Catholics began arriving, and that the largest increases were among Baptists and Methodists.²⁵ The increase in membership continued right into the 1980s (except for a brief decline during the Civil War). In addition, the rapid growth in the number of Mormons, a faith that, at least in the United States, has not emphasized recruitment among immigrants, suggests that immigration cannot be the entire explanation for American religiosity.²⁶

Moreover, German immigrants when they first move to America have been like Germans still living in their homeland, that is, most are Luther-

23. There is a spirited debate among scholars as to what level of church attendance exists in this country. For an argument that attendance is less than half of what the polls suggest, see C. Kirk Hardaway, Penny Long Marler, and Mark Chaves, "What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance," *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993): 741–52; Stanley Presser and Linda Stimson, "Data Collection Mode and Social Desirability Bias in Self-Reported Religious Attendance," *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 137–45; and Robert D. Woodberry, "When Surveys Lie and People Tell the Truth: How Surveys Oversample Church Attenders," *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 119–22. Criticisms of these views are in Theodore Caplow, "The Case of the Phantom Episcopalians," *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 112–13; Michael Hout and Andrew Greeley, "The Center Doesn't Hold: Church Attendance in the United States, 1940–1984," *American Sociological Review* 52 (1987): 325–45; and Hout and Greeley, "What Church Officials' Reports Don't Show: Another Look at Church Attendance Data," *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 113–19.

24. The immigrant argument is made in Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 219–20.

25. Stark and Finke, "American Religion in 1776: A Statistical Portrait," *Sociological Analysis* 49 (1988): 39–51; Finke and Stark, "Turning Pews into People: Estimating 19th Century Church Membership," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25 (1986): 180–92.

26. By 1980, Mormons were the fifth-largest denomination in the United States. See Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," in *Latter-Day Saint Social Life*, edited by James T. Duke (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1998), 16. Mormons are recruited not in areas where religiosity is strong but where it is weak. Cf. Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

ans who do not go to church frequently. But third-generation Germans here are much like Americans, that is, they have joined the Baptist, Methodist, or some evangelical church and attend services as frequently as most other Americans.²⁷

A second explanation that also has some importance is one advanced by Professor Jose Casanova: Europe was governed by “caesaropapist churches,” whereas the United States was not.²⁸ If I may translate Casanova’s sociological jargon, I believe he means by “caesaropapist” that Europe was for centuries ruled by nations or principalities that combined church and state into an absolutist rule (though after the Protestant Reformation, it seems a bit misleading to call Calvin’s Geneva or Luther’s Sweden “papist”).

His central argument, if not his language, is, I believe, correct. Where the state enforced religious orthodoxy, both the church and the state were vulnerable to popular revolts. The hostility to liberalism expressed by Pope Pius IX meant that European states had to choose between obedience and rebellion. Sometimes, as with the Kulturkampf in Germany in the nineteenth century, the state attacked the status of the Catholic Church. The demand for representative government was inevitably linked to the demand for religious freedom. One could not endorse the French Revolution without attacking the Catholic Church that had for decades been protected by the state. And even when the church lost its monopoly power, many European states continued to participate in its management in ways that made political dissent equivalent to religious dissent. In France, the state must still approve the appointment of Catholic bishops.²⁹ In Scandinavia where the official churches are Protestant, these religious bodies were not disestablished so much as converted into instruments of the welfare state. In Sweden, the government supports a state church with tax revenues; church laws are passed by Parliament, and all bishops are appointed by the state. At the same time, Sweden abolished all religious requirements for serving on church governing boards, a step that allowed church control to be placed in the hands of atheists. In virtually every European nation, there is a tax-supported state church.³⁰

27. Rodney Stark, “Germans and German-American Religion: Approximating a Crucial Experiment,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (1997): 182–93.

28. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 29.

29. David Barrett et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 284.

30. Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 228–30.

When this is the case, political and religious affiliations tend to coincide. In much of Europe, Catholic political parties arose after the First World War; in countries such as Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, these parties governed for many years. Religiously defined parties helped bring voters into representative government, but rule by Christian Democrats did nothing to strengthen Christianity. On the contrary, people who opposed Christian parties learned to oppose Christianity. A liberal or socialist party (or in France, a Gaullist one) became almost by definition a non-Christian one.³¹

Tocqueville explained the advantages of a separation of church and state in 1835: in nations where religion forms “an alliance with a political power, religion augments its authority over a few and forfeits the hope of reigning over all.” When this alliance exists, as it has in Europe, the “unbelievers of Europe attack the Christians as their political opponents rather than as their religious adversaries.”³²

England, like Europe, has had a state church. For centuries Catholics ruled but then were replaced by Anglican rule; for a brief period the Puritans ruled. Beginning in the later part of the seventeenth century, officeholders had to subscribe to Anglicanism, and students matriculating at Oxford and Cambridge had to sign the Twenty-nine Articles of Anglican faith. Marriages and burials had to follow Anglican rites. When a liberal political movement emerged in the nineteenth century, nonconformist sects were part of its animating spirit; as William Gladstone said, nonconformity was the “backbone” of the English Liberal Party.³³ The efforts by Anabaptists, Catholics, Jews, Methodists, Quakers, and Unitarians to carve out religious freedom were, of necessity, focused on the state and its traditional religious authority.

RELIGION, POLITICS, AND MARKETS

The close ties between state and church have no counterpart in the United States. It is true, of course, that many colonies in America had important religious policies. Six required their voters to be Protestants, four said their citizens must believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible, one

31. Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway, eds., *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), esp. 30–33; Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 258–64.

32. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, edited by Phillips Bradley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 1:310, 314.

33. Andrew C. Gould, *Origins of Liberal Dominance: State, Church, and Party in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 121–22.

required belief in the Trinity and two in heaven and hell, and five had an officially established church.³⁴ But when the United States was created out of these colonies, it could be done only by adopting a federal constitution that left all of these matters to the states. The Constitution said nothing about religion except to ban religious tests for office, and the First Amendment made it impossible ever to have a national church. (Just what else the amendment means by its ban on any law “respecting an establishment of religion” is unclear, but that it banned a national religion or church is indisputable.) The reason for official national silence on religious matters owes something to the writings of John Locke, Roger Williams, James Madison, and other defenders of religious tolerance, but it owes even more, I think, to the fact that no national union was possible if the federal government had any religious powers. Americans were worried that a national government with religious powers would persecute dissenters here just as they had been attacked in England. Religion was felt to be a state matter and remained so until the Supreme Court changed the rules in 1947.³⁵ Though the newly united American states took religion seriously, the people defined themselves not by their religious or ethnic identity but by the American Creed as set forth in the Declaration of Independence.

Despite federal silence on religious matters, in the United States there have been many political movements linked to religious ideas. Indeed, the nation became, as Mark Dewolfe Howe put it, a *de facto* Protestant state, with local schools teaching religious beliefs, state governments enforcing the Sabbath with blue laws, and many political efforts to mobilize anti-Catholic sentiment. In Oregon, the Ku Klux Klan and other groups obtained passage of a law that would have banned Catholics from running their own schools, a policy that was struck down in 1925 by a unanimous Supreme Court.³⁶

One of the reasons that a policy of separating church and state found so many Protestant supporters is that the chief virtue of separation was its tendency to prevent the Roman Catholic Church from achieving a unification of church and state. This was the theme of many Protestant demands, some based on describing the pope as the Antichrist, and found

34. James Q. Wilson, “The Reform Islam Needs,” *City Journal* (Autumn 2002): 29–30; Donald G. Swift, *Religion and the American Experience* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 13.

35. *Everson v. United States*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947), made the religious clauses of the First Amendment applicable to the states via the Fourteenth Amendment.

36. *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925). On church-state relations, see Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

constitutional expression in the demand for the passage of the Blaine amendment in 1874. The amendment was never ratified, but copies of it found their way into several state constitutions.

There was, of course, never much evidence that Catholics wanted to merge state and church. Indeed, Protestant demands that public schools teach Protestantism led many Catholic leaders to endorse the principle of separation and favor locally controlled school districts as ways of preventing anti-Catholic programs.³⁷ In short, in a religiously diverse nation, pressure came from several religions to avoid state influence on churches.

Despite the many state efforts to benefit or attack religion, the absence of any federal policy on the matter has made the United States fundamentally different from England. American churches find themselves in a free market where their existence and growth depend entirely on their own efforts. They get no tax money and confront federal officials who are indifferent to any demands for support. The churches and synagogues that grow are the ones that offer people something of value; the ones that decline are those that offer people relatively little of value except such social status as may come from being seen at services.³⁸ Privatizing religion has generated religious growth, just as privatizing business has encouraged economic development.

In England, religion was closely linked both to political authority and to social status. Into the twentieth century, Protestantism was associated with the monarchy and the empire, and religion was linked at first with aristocratic hierarchies and then with radical theologians, neither of whom earned much respect from the average Briton. Even today, the archbishop of Canterbury is appointed by the prime minister. In England, the Anglican Church offered aristocratic bravado and then Christian socialism, later renamed Christian sociology.³⁹ England had no local governments or local units of political parties that could be controlled by religious groups, and scarcely any local media that could represent religious preferences. Methodists in England began as a dissenting group among Anglicans, and

37. Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, chap. 8 and pp. 297–98.

38. The free-market view of church activities is developed at length in Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992); and Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*. I believe they are correct about the United States, but I am not convinced that their theory explains differences among countries in religious affiliations. There are too many specific political and cultural differences that must be taken into account to make any single theory useful in comparative religious politics.

39. Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, 21; E. R. Norman, *Church and Society in England, 1770–1970* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 314–16, 364–75, 418–74.

for many years they sought to maintain their status as an especially devout but not rebellious part of the Church of England, and so surrendered much of their evangelical zeal.⁴⁰

The contrast with America could not be sharper. In an influential book, a member of the liberal National Council of Churches observed the growth of religiously demanding churches and the decline of religiously undemanding ones. What we now call the mainline Protestant churches (the Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and more theologically liberal Lutheran churches) are losing members, whereas the more ardent, evangelical, and fundamentalist churches (the Southern Baptists, Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Assemblies of God, and Salvation Army) are growing in membership.⁴¹ He explained this difference as occurring not because mainline churches are politically liberal but because they do not offer a compelling set of religious incentives, namely, finding salvation through Christ, supplying meaningful worship services, and providing religious instruction.⁴² The churches that are losing out are, in Kelley's words, "reasonable and sociable," whereas those winning out are "unreasonable and unsociable." They are "unreasonable" in that they refuse to recognize the validity of the teachings of other churches, observe unusual rituals and peculiar dietary customs, practice temperance, and disregard what some people, especially secularists, would call the decent opinions of mankind.

These arguments by a religious leader have been supported by the work of empirical scholars. Laurence R. Iannacone and his colleagues have shown that strict Protestant churches grow more rapidly than lax ones because strictness raises the level of membership commitment, increases the benefits of belonging, discourages participation in rival organizations, and reduces the number of free riders who go to church but pass on the costs of attending to others. Compared to mainline churches, strict ones grow more rapidly and have higher rates of participation, and these relationships exist independently of the age, sex, race, income, region, or marital

40. David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), esp. 58; Hempton, *The Religion of the People* (London: Routledge, 1996), 6-27. I am grateful to Roger Finke for these references.

41. Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), chap. 1. Finke and Stark, in "Turning Pews into People," agree with Kelley's views but give evidence that the decline in mainline church membership began not in the 1960s, as Kelley argued, but at least by the 1940s (248).

42. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches*, ix, 91-94.

status of the members. Church growth abroad is also most rapid in nations that do not have a state church.⁴³

Matters are more complicated in nations that have dictatorial political regimes, as did the old Soviet Union and some Muslim states today. Where there is political freedom, the absence of a state church facilitates the growth of religion; where political freedom is lacking, state churches may either require participation or a secular regime may make public displays of religion undesirable. These are contested issues, and one should compare the work of Iannacone and others who stress markets with that of Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart who emphasize cultural values.⁴⁴

Adam Smith was not only correct about what produces economic prosperity but also correct about what produces religious success.⁴⁵ In doing these things, the growing churches are trying to provide meaning to life, not simply lectures on political issues and pleasant social affairs, all accompanied by the view that no one has a monopoly on the truth, a critical view of the Bible, and a generous recognition of individual differences. The growing churches “try to make sense out of experience, even if we have to resort to non-sense to do it.”⁴⁶ American Methodists never tried to work within the confines of a state church but from the first established themselves as the leaders of independent camp meetings led by itinerant preachers. Political and cultural localism sustained here what political and cultural centralization curbed in England.

The reason that some churches are growing worries many people who think, rightly, that they oppose the Enlightenment and, wrongly, that this opposition leads to bad public policies. I have a somewhat different view.

RELIGION CONSTRAINED BY POLITICS

One must begin by recognizing that both religious and secular groups can do undesirable or even terrible things. Churches in America have supported blue laws, but secularists have supported the more extreme forms of political correctness. Some religious extremists have murdered abortion workers, but the Weather Underground and the Symbionese Libera-

43. Iannacone, “Why Strict Churches Are Strong,” *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (1994): 1180–1211; Iannacone, Roger Finke, and Rodney Stark, “Deregulating Religion: The Economics of Church and State,” *Economic Inquiry* (1997): 350–64.

44. Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, chap. 10.

45. Iannacone, “The Consequences of Religious Market Structure,” *Rationality and Society* 3 (1991): 156–77. Indeed, Smith made exactly this prediction in *The Wealth of Nations*, edited by R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 2:788–89.

46. *Why Conservative Churches*, 38.

tion Army, both totally devoid of any religious sentiments, also murdered people and blew up buildings. Evangelical and fundamentalist religions have opposed abortion and rejected homosexual marriage, but secular courts have created these issues by authorizing abortions and homosexual marriage without any democratic support. Religious leaders encouraged the Crusades that resulted in looting and death, but fascism and Stalinism killed millions of innocent people as well. Fanaticism is an equal-opportunity employer.

My central argument is that in the United States, unlike in England or on the European continent, religion has had a remarkably democratic character. Protestant churches organized people on the basis of their consent, endorsed cultural but not political conflicts within the state, and acquired status locally because in this country political authority was decentralized. American churches created problems, of course. Protestantism, though democratic, was not always liberal (by "liberal" I mean disposed toward personal freedom). Though it was preoccupied with cultural rather than political issues, Protestantism was often anti-Catholic and sought political power to enforce blue laws. Protestantism, though decentralized, could use local political authority to do unwise things, such as attacking evolutionary biology. But taken as a whole, rising church movements here were compatible with and even encouraged an open society by supporting personal choice, not arguing for a state-supported church, and limiting their actions to local governments rather than trying to manage the nation as a whole.

Religion has, of course, had an impact on American public policy. Because it is powerful in certain localities, it carries weight when it tries to block congressional votes going toward causes it rejects. This is true for both Democratic and Republican administrations and means that organized religion can provide vetoes much as can Planned Parenthood and the National Rifle Association.

But as with other organizations with strong local constituencies, religion must compete with rival interests to obtain whatever new legislation it wishes. Despite the presence of conservative presidents, scarcely any bill favored by what is now called the Christian Right has been passed by Congress. Protestant leaders could not prevent the creation of Catholic schools, and religious activists could not legally install school prayer, maintain a ban on abortion, or obtain meaningful bans on pornography. Despite the efforts of the Moral Majority and the 700 Club, conservative religious voters could not nominate a presidential candidate. And several

religious leaders have suffered, just as several political ones have, from various scandals.⁴⁷ The very factors that encourage religious organizations (free markets, a decentralized government, a localized media) are the very things that discourage religious activists from having much impact on national or even state policy.⁴⁸

In England, by contrast, the existence of an alliance between Anglican ministers and political authorities, the need for nonconforming sects to struggle against a state church, and the deep social class basis of religion meant that either religion would be imposed from above or it would vanish for lack of success. As England became more tolerant, no enforced religion could be imposed, but as England remained centralized, religion would lack the “unlimited social space” that it enjoyed in America.⁴⁹ And so religion in England collapsed while in the United States it grew.

THE CONSTRAINTS OF POLITICAL LIFE

Christian political activists have responded to this reality by adapting to the constraints of American politics. As a political scientist, I am naturally inclined to look for the constraining effects of culture and constitutions. Even allowing for my bias, I am persuaded that religious leaders, like political and economic ones, adjust to the opportunities and barriers our political and legal system has created. To reach these conclusions, one first has to wade through and then overcome the rhetoric with which Christian political leaders and their critics surround themselves. When Rev. Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority in the 1970s, he claimed that it had four million members with two million active donors, and some liberal critics were worried that it was a “disciplined, charging army.” In fact, it was neither disciplined nor an army and had vastly fewer members than its leaders proclaimed; by 1987 it had closed down for want of any influence. It was replaced by several organizations, including the Christian Coalition led by Ralph Reed, but the coalition adapted to past failures by moderating religious rhetoric and identifying reasonable goals it could attain by working in parallel with the Republican Party. For example, coalition

47. For a summary of what the Christian Right has or has not accomplished, see Steve Bruce, *Conservative Protestant Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 164–89. On the scandals afflicting Pat Robertson and various televangelists, see Steve Bruce, *Pray TV: Televangelism in America* (London: Routledge, 1990), 172–73, 198–212.

48. J. Christopher Sopher, “Divided by a Common Religion: The Christian Right in England and the United States,” in *Sojourners in the Wilderness*, edited by Smidt and Penning, 186.

49. Hempton, *Religion of the People*, 16.

leaders tried to restrict rather than outlaw abortion and worked toward obtaining a child tax credit. The most extreme religious activists were kept out of coalition leadership posts. In Virginia, the coalition worked with secular conservatives, such as Republican governor George Allen in his 1993 campaign. Allen refused to argue for a ban on abortion, but conservative Christians backed him because they had learned to settle for half a loaf.⁵⁰

These constraints arise, as Robert Wuthnow has pointed out, from living in a culture that has for many decades struggled with the tension between Christianity and civility, the need to cope with political resistance, and the ecumenical efforts of such organizations as the National Conference of Christians and Jews.⁵¹

The constraints imposed by America's culture and constitution affected many faiths. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Roman Catholicism was under attack here because it was based on a hierarchical church that had attacked liberalism. But that claim about American Catholics was never true; Alexis de Tocqueville and Harriet Martineau had both pointed out early in the nineteenth century that, as she put it, "the Catholic religion is modified by the spirit of the time in America." Despite her view, the attacks on Catholics increased so that by 1949 Paul Blanshard's book *American Freedom and Catholic Power* was a best-seller, warmly endorsed by John Dewey, Lewis Mumford, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Bertrand Russell.⁵² They seemingly had good grounds for their concerns: Catholic leaders had endorsed autocracy in Spain and Portugal, and the pope had signed a concordat with Hitler.

But at the very same time, Catholic theologians such as Jacques Maritain in France and John Courtney Murray in this country were modifying

50. Laura Berkowitz and John C. Green, "Charting the Coalition: The Local Chapters of the Ohio Christian Coalition," in *Sojourners in the Wilderness*, edited by Smidt and Penning, 42–45; Francis Fitzgerald, "A Disciplined Charging Army," *New Yorker* 57 (1981): 53–97; Mary E. Bendyna and Clyde Wilcox, "The Christian Right Old and New," in *Sojourners in the Wilderness*, edited by Smidt and Penning, 53–55; Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, *Second Coming: The New Christian Right in Virginia Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 216–21. This last view is reinforced by a fine-grained study of conservative Christian rhetoric and actions by Jon A. Shields for his University of Virginia Ph.D. dissertation. Robert Wuthnow wrote that "religious conservatives have accommodated to the norms of secular rationality" (*The Restructuring of American Religion* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988], 302).

51. Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 32, 188, 198.

52. Martineau, *Society in America* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837), 2:323; John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 2003), 166–70.

Catholic philosophy in order to accommodate it to American sensibilities. They set forth an American Catholic position based on a concern for democracy and individual rights. Their views, however much they may have irritated the Vatican, fitted nicely with the actual experience of American Catholics, and, after John F. Kennedy won the presidency in 1960, anti-Catholic sentiment began to evaporate. Catholics behaved in much the same way as conservative Protestants: to persuade Americans, you must be American.

IDENTIFYING RELIGIOUS VOTERS

Liberal critics of Christian conservatives would have you believe that the Christian Right consists of fundamentalist evangelicals who, lacking much education and living in small southern towns, are conspiring under the direction of their ministers to take over the nation.

To address this argument one first has to sort through the rhetoric. First, some distinctions: Fundamentalists are not necessarily (or even often) evangelists, neither movement was born in the South, the leaders of these movements have often been people of considerable education, and the great majority of churchgoers attend services where politics is not mentioned. Fundamentalists believe in the accuracy of the Bible and often work hard to maintain the correctness of their view against other Protestant denominations. Evangelists may or may not have a fundamentalist view; their mission is less to defend the faith than to recruit new members to it. Both movements were created not in the South but in Boston, Chicago, and New York City, and their intellectual sponsorship was at the Princeton Theological Seminary and the Yale Divinity School. Most of the early leaders were affluent and well educated, and on many political issues these groups have either endorsed liberal views or worked in concert with progressive leaders on such matters as restricting immigration. In the 2004 elections, 87 percent of church ministers never mentioned a candidate, and of those that did the majority did not urge a vote for either candidate.⁵³

Fundamentalists and evangelicals were not always allies and on occasion became bitter opponents. Some fundamentalists, having failed to defeat the liberal social gospel, turned away from all alliances and often departed their own churches to found new, doctrinally pure ones. Fundamentalists emphasized their rejection of worldly delights, which often

53. Christian Smith et al., *American Evangelicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1–7; “Mobilizing the Faithful,” Gallup Poll, December 21, 2004.

meant rejecting the world itself. Evangelicals, on the other hand, were eager to spread the word without abandoning their churches. Such leaders as Charles Fuller and Billy Graham wanted to save souls more than they sought doctrinal purity. When it was founded, the National Association of Evangelicals invited Pentecostals and Anabaptists to join it, much to the horror of fundamentalists. (One early fundamentalist minister called Pentecostals “the last vomit of Satan.”) The split between fundamentalists and evangelicals became vivid when, in 1957, Billy Graham asked the liberal Protestant Council of New York City to help organize his crusade.⁵⁴

Analyzing fundamentalists and evangelicals is difficult because public opinion surveys are not very good ways of measuring deep subjective states. As Professor Christian Smith has pointed out, when the Gallup Poll defines evangelicals, it asserts that they believe the Bible is literally true, have had a “born again” experience, and have recruited others to Christianity. But his own detailed interviews show that self-identified evangelicals often differ from these Gallup traits: some doubt that the Bible is literally true, some have not been born again, and some never recruit anyone. If you use the Gallup definition of evangelicals, you discover that they do not have much education. But if you let people define themselves as evangelical, they turn out to be very well educated.⁵⁵ Self-identified evangelicals tell pollsters that they are more educated than nonreligious respondents. One-quarter are high school graduates, a fifth are college graduates, and a sixth have done postgraduate work. By contrast, one-fifth of nonreligious people have not even graduated from high school.⁵⁶

Christian evangelicals and fundamentalists are alike in having become conservative. But that statement is not much different from noting that secular voters have become liberal. The Princeton Theological Seminary and the Yale Divinity School may once have encouraged evangelical Christianity, but today they are barely able to endorse Christianity.

If you use the best surveys to compare conservative Protestants to all other Americans, you discover that they differ in some ways and are alike in others. Conservative Protestants, unlike most Americans, believe morality is based on an absolute standard, that religion should play a role in public life, and that salvation can be found only through Jesus Christ.

54. Rozell and Wilcox, *Second Coming*, 10, 14.

55. Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 10.

56. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 77. See also Wuthnow, *Challenges of Religious Diversity*, 210.

But conservative Protestants are like all other Americans in supporting the civil liberties of people with whom they disagree, respect for Jews, allowing people to live by their own morality even when it is not Christian, and attitudes toward abortion.

THE APPARENT BENEFITS OF RELIGION

Religion is also important in a deeper, nonpolitical way. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that, other things being equal, people with a strong religious faith are more likely to live in two-parent families, achieve upward economic mobility, resist the lures of drugs and crime, overcome health problems, and give money to charity (including to non-religious charities). Religious liberals are more likely to donate money and time than secular ones, and religious conservatives are more likely to donate than secular conservatives, even after controlling for race, education, and income.⁵⁷ I use the word *suggests* very deliberately, for when scholars look at the effects of religion with “other things being equal,” it is obvious that other things are not entirely equal. After all, people who take religion seriously are likely to differ from those who do not in some important but unmeasured way. We cannot fully control for unmeasured difference by statistical manipulations. It would be nice to assign religious beliefs to a random sample of people and then observe their effects, but happily that is impossible.

Nevertheless, there are many studies that find these religious effects independently of the sex, age, race, and income of people, and so together they create an important argument that ought to be taken seriously. In 1998, a review of several dozen studies of religion and health concluded that “religious commitment may play a beneficial role in preventing mental and physical illness, improving how people cope with mental and physical illness, and facilitating recovery for illness.”⁵⁸

In 1979–1980, a survey was conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research among black males ages sixteen to twenty-four living in the poorest neighborhoods of Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Religiosity was measured by statements about the strength of religion in the lives of respondents and the frequency of attending church. Crime was measured by whether respondents said that they had committed any of several illegal acts in the past year. Scholars have found an association be-

57. Arthur C. Brooks, “Religious Faith and Charitable Giving,” *Policy Review* 121 (2003): 39–50.

58. Dale A. Matthews et al., “Religious Commitment and Health Status,” *Archives of Family Medicine* 7 (1998): 118–24.

tween low levels of delinquency and religiosity after controlling for other factors, such as age, education, gang membership, or living in public housing or with a single parent.⁵⁹

Essentially, the same findings emerge from a study that uses a different source of data (black respondents in the National Youth Survey) and takes into account the level of neighborhood disorder on crime. Crime rates are lower when the respondents attend church frequently, and church attendance tends to immunize people from the hostile effects of disorderly neighborhoods, and these effects exist even after controlling for sex, age, single-parent families, and links to deviant peers.⁶⁰

There is also evidence of an association between religious affiliation and the extent to which women cohabit rather than marry: the least religious are more likely to cohabit; the most religious are more likely to marry. Similar findings suggest that suicide rates, alcoholism, and drug abuse are less common among religious than among nonreligious people.⁶¹ Comparable findings have been produced for marital happiness, low rates of illegitimacy, and the absence of depression.

Deeply religious people contribute more to charity in this country than do secular people, even after controlling for differences and partisanship. Religious liberals give much more to charity than do secular liberals, and religious conservatives give much more than do secular ones. Moreover, this higher charitable giving among religious people is not confined to religious recipients: religious people give more than secular ones to *nonreligious* causes.⁶²

59. Byron R. Johnson et al., "Escaping from the Crime of Inner Cities: Church Attendance and Religious Salience among Disadvantaged Youth," *Justice Quarterly* 17 (2000): 377–91. See also Richard B. Freeman, "Who Escapes?" in *The Black Youth Employment Crisis*, edited by Freeman and H. J. Holzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

60. Byron R. Johnson et al., "The 'Invisible Institution' and Black Youth Crime," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 29 (2000): 479–98. See also Charles R. Tittle and Michael R. Welch, "Religiosity and Deviance," *Social Forces* 61 (1983): 653–82.

61. Arland Thornton, William G. Axinn, and Daniel H. Hill, "Reciprocal Effects of Religiosity, Cohabitation, and Marriage," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1992): 628–51; William T. Martin, "Religiosity and United States Suicide Rates, 1972–1978," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 40 (1984): 1166–69; Steven Sack, "The Effect of Domestic Religious Individualism on Suicide, 1954–1978," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 47 (1985): 431–47; David B. Larson and William P. Wilson, "Religious Lives of Alcoholics," *Southern Medical Journal* 73 (1980): 723–27; Robert H. Coombs, David K. Wellisch, and Fawzy I. Fawzy, "Drinking Patterns and Problems among Female Children and Adolescents," *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* 11 (1985): 315–48; Richard L. Gorsuch and M. C. Butler, "Initial Drug Abuse," *Psychological Bulletin* 3 (1976): 120–37; Ron D. Hays et al., "Multistage Path Models of Adolescent Alcohol and Drug Use," *Journal of Drug Issues* 16 (1986): 357–69; M. Daum and M. A. Lavenhar, "Religiosity and Drug Use," *National Institute of Drug Abuse, ADM* 80-939 (1980).

62. See Brooks, "Religious Faith and Charitable Giving."

All of these arguments have to be placed into context. There are many nonreligious people who are healthy, happy, free of alcohol or drug abuse, not likely to kill themselves, and philanthropic to a fault. But among people at risk for these problems because they are poor or live in bad neighborhoods, religion may buffer the otherwise harmful effects of their environment.

This is a hard argument to sustain before an academic audience because many professors and intellectuals are the creatures of detached reason for whom religion is a sign of personal failure, low self-esteem, or pure ignorance. The chasm of repugnance and dislike that separates Americans who are secular from those who are religious is a great pity. Professor William J. Stuntz of the Harvard Law School has tried to bridge that chasm: He describes himself as an evangelical Protestant who works at a secular university. He is a Red-state voter at a Blue-state university. He has fretted in an important essay about how much each side has to learn from the other. Both sides—those in churches and those teaching at universities—struggle to understand difficult texts, worry about important ideas, and share a concern for helping the poor. Instead, each side is preoccupied with abortion and views the other with deep suspicion. Professor Stuntz recounts the remarks of a faculty colleague who said he was the first Christian he had ever met who was not stupid and a member of Stuntz's church who thought that being a Christian lawyer was like being a Christian prostitute.⁶³

OUR SHARED OBLIGATIONS

Both sides could use a bit more humility. Evangelical Christians often forget that it was the Enlightenment and its commitment to scientific learning that helped create a prosperous modern world, while secular professors seem to ignore the unease and uncertainty that necessarily afflict everyone who wishes to understand the human condition.

Religion in the United States exists because the United States is free. Countries that were never free or that retained a state-controlled church are not religious either because religion, and the deep human yearnings that sustain religion, was never allowed to be expressed or because the state has made religion a divisive matter about which the people vote.

As Alan Wolfe has made clear, American democracy has shaped American religion just as much as religion has influenced our democracy. It is

63. Stuntz, "Faculty Clubs and Church Pews," *Tech Central Station* (a Web log), November 29, 2004.

easy to overlook this mutual effect. Liberals often wrongly think that what religious people say about their beliefs is an accurate guide to how in fact they behave, just as religious people sometimes think that secular people must lead lives of unrestrained dissipation.⁶⁴ Neither view is correct. Both sides have come to share in the American political ethos with its commitment to toleration and moderation.

In the United States, a weak central government and a proliferation of diverse and independent local governments have produced a condition, as Tocqueville said 170 years ago, in which public action requires the mobilization of private motives. In Europe where any public action is government action, private motives are less important. In America where a legacy of personal freedom has made private motives very important, for many people religion supplies those motives.

Apart from whatever beneficial effects religion may have on health or happiness, American preoccupation with religion, especially since the emergence of the so-called Christian Right, has helped improve the level of political participation. The organization of countless religious sects that are both self-governing and required to compete for members in a theological free market has engaged many people in a world that endorses democratic rule. By various lectures, essays, advertisements, and government programs they seek to encourage participation, but what they encourage the most, especially among people who are not well off, are those religious beliefs with which they have been imbued.

The country today is more divided by religion than by income, and often that division is passionate. But the legacy of America is that we must live together; we must, in the words of one columnist, recognize that “there is no one vocabulary we can use to settle great issues.”⁶⁵ Some religious conservatives demand that we replace teaching evolution with teaching creationism, or its latest substitute, “intelligent design.” Some secular liberals want to defy the laws of the state of California and authorize gay marriages. One can support a student having choices about what to study or a law authorizing gay civil unions, but the passions that are aroused by premature efforts to impose one view or the other without following the due process of the law are harmful. Even worse is the tendency of the mass media to say that rallying to support Terri Schiavo or defending heterosexual marriage will “ignite a culture war,” whereas violating state law on behalf of

64. Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 252.

65. David Brooks, “Stuck in Lincoln’s Land,” *New York Times*, date unknown.

a secular goal is only an affirmation of human rights. There is a culture war, but unfortunately our press informs us about only one side of it.

If the left wing of the Democratic Party is to become once again a national rather than a regional organization, it must enter into a new dialogue with faith communities. This means discussing, not simply defending, abortion and embracing a commitment to life that extends beyond opposition to the death penalty so that the commitment includes people in a persistent vegetative state. It means taking seriously not only gender but also obscenity, not only racial diversity but also black crime, not only gay marriage but marriage generally, not only barriers to the advancement of women but also differences between women and men. If the right wing of the Republican Party wishes to remain a national party, its supporters cannot attack abortion doctors, use legislative fiat to usurp scientific knowledge, or say that judges must be held accountable for doing what an independent judiciary is supposed to do.

The effect of religion on political polarization in America is unmistakable. Religious conservatives have become an influential part of the Republican Party and secular liberals an important part of the Democratic Party. Polarization, thus, reflects more than merely preferences; it embraces deeply held beliefs. That division is worrisome because it reawakens in the United States a deep tension that we can observe in many earlier periods, such as when hostility to Catholics and Jews was politically salient. After the Second World War, we largely overcame that tension. The great strength of this country is that we have learned to live together despite our deepest passions. Now our passions are once again dividing us. Yale Law School professor Stephen L. Carter highlighted the problem when he described two black evangelical women who left the Democratic Party and embraced conservative Christian organizations because, as Carter put it, “they preferred a place that honored their faith and disdained their politics over a place that honored their politics and disdained their faith.” Alan Wolfe, who unlike Carter is not a religious man, makes much the same point: “Americans love God and democracy and see no contradiction between the two. . . . [B]elievers are full citizens of the United States, and it is time to make peace between them and the rest of America.”⁶⁶

66. Carter, *The Dissent of the Governed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 9; Wolfe, *Transformation of American Religion*, 255.