

God in the Corridors of Power

*Christian Conservatives, the
Media, and Politics in America*

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 ∞ Christian Conservatives: Past and Present	33
Chapter 2 ∞ Media, Religion, and Politics: Conservative Voices	87
Chapter 3 ∞ American Conservatism: “A Jungle of Twisted Thoughts”	147
Chapter 4 ∞ The Constitution and Civil Religion: Obstacles to Christian Conservatives	187
Chapter 5 ∞ Sex, Gender, and Religion: The Contraception and Abortion Conundrum	229
Chapter 6 ∞ Sex, Gender, and Religion: The Gay Marriage and Family Conundrum	281
Chapter 7 ∞ Science, Theology, and Charles Darwin’s Legacy	321
Chapter 8 ∞ Terrorism, Media, and Religion: From 9/11 to Afghanistan	365

Chapter 9	∞ Militarism, Media, and Religion: From Afghanistan to Iraq	403
Chapter 10	∞ Conclusion: A Christian Life in American Politics	441
<i>Index</i>		467

Introduction

Christian values would be far easier to define and to live by if Jesus had simply been made to say somewhere in the gospels that scripture is (or is not) God’s Word and it should (or should not) be taken literally; that a Christian is obligated (or not) to impose Christian ideology on non-Christians—to convert (or not) non-Christians to the “true” faith so they might enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It would also be helpful if Christians could know how Jesus felt about abortion and gay marriage, intelligent design and science, public funding for religious schools, and other “theological” issues that seem to plague so many Christians today.

Jesus, however, did not render judgments on these issues—issues that have ignited the ire of religious conservatives and sometimes have been molded into a powerful force in American politics. They cut across individual Christian churches and denominations, across synagogues and other places of worship, and across laity and clergy. Conservative religious language pervades not only a broad spectrum of Christianity but also significant voting constituencies of non-Christian and even nonreligious Americans. *God in the Corridors of Power* seeks to identify and to clarify these multiple, and sometimes contradictory, Christian voices and to situate them in contexts that reflect the complexities of American Christianity in the past and at present.

Before the 1960s, the views of Christian conservatives about what it meant to be a Christian in America were typically based on denominational differences. Protestants and Catholics, for example, were perceived at the time as cool or even antagonistic toward one another. Harold John Ockenga (1905–1985)—a founder with

Charles E. Fuller (1887–1968) and others of Fuller Theological Seminary, which would become a leading Protestant training school for evangelical fundamentalist clergy—“identified Catholicism as one of the chief threats to America, along with communism and secularism” in a speech before the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942.¹ Anti-Catholic prejudices among Protestant conservatives would reach a high point with the exploitation of the anti-Catholic vote during the 1960 Kennedy/Nixon presidential election.

Protestants and Catholics in reality, however, held similar economic, political, and even religious values. American Christianity began to fragment along *political* lines essentially in response to social changes that first surfaced in public discourse in the extraordinary decade of the 1960s. Ecclesiastical divisions became less distinct, while other divisions—rooted in America’s changing cultural landscape—became more visible *within* these faith communities.

Roman Catholicism reflects the ideological rifts that permeated many Christian communities. Various religious and social issues in the wake of the reforms mandated by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (1962–1965), popularly known as Vatican II, had a decisive impact on American Catholicism. Reformers stepped up their challenge to official church policies on a wide range of ecclesiastical practices, including the liturgy and the status of women in religious appointments and activities, in church discipline, and in the role of the pope and the Roman Curia in church governance. They urged more robust participation in interdenominational discussions of theology and the meaning of spirituality, seminary education, and the sharing of fundamental liturgical rites such as Holy Communion. They urged a greater commitment to the Christian ecumenical movement, and they urged a more determined response to the plight of the world’s poor and powerless.²

Vatican II was intended to liberalize the church and to make it more transparent, but these religious and social changes prompted many Catholic conservatives to seek a return to the pre-Vatican II church. The activities of Catholic reformers provoked a backlash that mirrored in some respects the experiences of their Protestant counterparts. Catholic conservatives would become the second largest religious grouping, after Protestant conservatives, in the Republican Party in the waning decades of the twentieth century.³

The influence of Protestant and Catholic conservatives in American politics has seldom been stronger than it has been in the past generation. These Christians are part of a political coalition—linked largely

to the Republican Party—that is even broader and stronger than they are. Christian conservatives have been extremely skilled at getting their messages across, and one of their own held for eight years the most powerful political office in the United States. Though frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted, Christian conservative activism is one of the hottest continuing news topics in the mass media and the subject of numerous books, articles, and essays. In the view of many critics and admirers, these Christians have had a commanding presence in public affairs, and they have imposed, or attempted to impose, their ideological values at all levels of government.⁴

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA

Christian conservatives differ from other Christians on a host of issues, but one overarching issue sets most apart from their more moderate or progressive Christian counterparts: their religious agenda is anchored in a very specific theological framework, which they define as Christian orthodoxy. This orthodoxy drives their political, economic, and social agendas, and they fully intend for it to drive America's political, economic, and social agendas.

Orthodox believers subscribe to several basic beliefs. They believe in God as a “Holy Trinity” (God as Father, God as Son, and God as Holy Spirit), in Jesus as The Christ (as being fully human and fully divine), and in the concept of original sin (a pollution that they believe has corrupted all of humanity from the origins of humanity). And they believe that original sin necessitated Christ's death and bodily resurrection for the salvation of humanity. The orthodox Christian knows these beliefs are the Truth, because they are proclaimed in the Word of God as foretold in what Christians call the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) and declared in the New Testament (Christian Bible). They also believe scripture—together with reason, church tradition, and the experiences of the Christian believer—teaches them that these beliefs (a) are rooted in the beginnings of the Christian faith and (b) provide the guidelines for Christian living today.

This orthodoxy is the theological and ecclesiastical lynchpin that is supposed to bind all Christians together. Christianity must be interpreted through the lens of orthodox (meaning the “right belief”) Christian doctrine, which also “implies both originality and majority opinion.”⁵ But the right belief was not hammered out until about 400 years after the death of Jesus. Orthodox Christianity was codified

in seven so-called ecumenical councils, of which four—Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451–452)—defined and described the boundaries of traditional Christianity, whereby orthodoxy triumphed over heresy (meaning “wrong belief”).⁶

Christianity for the next 1,500 years or so adhered to an orthodox set of doctrines, creed-based ritual and liturgical practices, and a prescribed scriptural canon. For the most part, male members of a church hierarchy in Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox congregations controlled the ecclesiastical structure until well into the twentieth century.

Some or all aspects of orthodoxy are still communicated by most Christian churches in America, and this orthodoxy is rarely questioned either in Christian media outlets or in the mass media’s coverage of Christianity. Many Christian conservatives yearn for an orthodox Christian past that they believe is in harmony with their most deeply held religious and social convictions. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the essence of conservatism is continuity—continuity with established institutions and religious, ethical, and moral traditions based on a real or an imagined past.

Nevertheless, Christians in America, and America is hardly alone, have witnessed a quiet revolution in religious scholarship and ecclesiastical practice in the past 40 years or so. More and more Christians of all denominations are questioning and challenging the conditions that gave rise to an orthodox mindset, and the cumulative impact of this inquiry amounts to a crisis in the meaning of Christianity for many Christians in America.

While the church affiliations of a majority of Christians suggest that their religious perspectives are probably close to traditional orthodoxy, we argue that most Christians do not base their lives on adherence to doctrines and creeds. Orthodox Christianity, moreover, means different things to individual Christians. Above all, their religious agenda does not inevitably drive their political and social agendas—as so many contemporary political, religious, and media observers seem to think.

A DIVERSE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

It is not hard to imagine that someone from another planet attending almost any Sunday service in the United States might well

conclude that Christianity in this country is monolithic. Members in church that day would all seem to believe in the same religious doctrines (anchored in the Bible and interpreted by the local priest or minister for believers) and worship similar religious symbols (such as the cross or the veneration of saints). The congregants would almost certainly represent a narrow range of demographics based primarily on race or ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Beneath the surface, however, Christian perspectives across denominations and within many congregations seem to be increasingly diverse—just as the religious landscape as a whole across America is becoming more diverse. We explore differing Christian perspectives in this section by focusing on (a) the diversity of Christianity in American life, primarily by examining surveys by the polling agency Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life,⁷ and (b) three distinct Christian perspectives identified as progressive, moderate, and conservative.

Diversity by the Numbers

The United States may or may not be a “Christian country,” but 78.4 percent of American adults identify themselves as Christians, according to the Pew Forum’s 2008 survey. Another 4.7 percent are members of other faith groups and 16.1 percent are unaffiliated. Pew surveyed 35,000 randomly selected adults 18 and over and conducted many interviews in Spanish, thereby including many Americans who often are excluded from polls.⁸ An earlier Pew study conducted in 2001, moreover, suggested that many Americans take their religion seriously.⁹ Sixty-four percent said religion was “very important” in their lives, 46 percent attended church at least once a week, and 60 percent attended at least once a month, as shown in Table 1. These respondents represent the core of the Christian conservative community.¹⁰

The 2008 survey shows that 51.3 percent of all adult Americans now say they identify with Protestant denominations, whereas 60–65 percent of respondents in surveys in the 1970s and 1980s claimed they were Protestants. The Protestant community “is characterized by significant internal diversity and fragmentation, encompassing hundreds of different denominations,” but most can be categorized into one of three traditions—evangelical faith groups

Table 1. Religious and Political Attitudes and Behaviors in the United States, in Percent (2008)

Religion is “very important” in daily lives (all Americans)	56
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	79
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	52
<i>Black Churches</i>	85
<i>Catholic Churches</i>	56
Attend church at least once a week	39
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	58
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	34
<i>Black Churches</i>	59
<i>Catholic Churches</i>	42
Attend church at least once a month	15
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	14
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	19
<i>Black Churches</i>	16
<i>Catholic Churches</i>	19
Bible is the Word of God to be taken literally	33
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	59
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	2
<i>Black Churches</i>	62
<i>Catholic Churches</i>	23
There is only one way to interpret “teachings of my religion”	27
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	41
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	14
<i>Black Churches</i>	39
<i>Catholic Churches</i>	19
“My religion is the one true faith leading to eternal life”	24
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	36
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	12
<i>Black Churches</i>	34
<i>Catholic Churches</i>	16
Self-described political ideology is conservative	37
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	52
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	36

<i>Black Churches</i>	35
<i>Catholic Churches</i>	36
Self-described political ideology is moderate	36
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	30
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	41
<i>Black Churches</i>	36
<i>Catholic Churches</i>	38
Self-described political ideology is liberal	20
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	11
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	18
<i>Black Churches</i>	21
<i>Catholic Churches</i>	18

Source: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, “Religion in America: Non-Dogmatic, Diverse and Politically Relevant,” Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, June 23, 2008, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/876/religion-america-part-two>.

(26.3 percent), mainline faith groups (18.1 percent), and historically black churches (6.9 percent).¹¹

The Catholic Church has recorded, among major denominations, the largest net loss of members as many Catholics have changed their affiliations, the 2008 survey shows. While 31 percent of Americans were raised as Catholics, only 23.9 percent identified themselves as Catholic in the study. Many Catholics have opted for other faith groups—especially Protestant evangelical groups—or are no longer affiliated with any faith group. This loss is offset mainly by an influx of immigrants and partly by individuals who left another faith group for Catholicism. Catholics outnumber Protestants among foreign-born adults by 46 percent to 24 percent, but among native-born Americans, Protestants outnumber Catholics by 55 percent to 21 percent.¹²

Other denominations within the Christian community include Mormon, 1.7 percent; Jehovah’s Witness, .7 percent; and Eastern Orthodox, .6 percent, according to the 2008 Pew survey. The Eastern Orthodox tradition is comprised primarily of Greek and Russian churches, but respondents mentioned roughly 12 other Orthodox churches (including Syrian, Armenian, Ukrainian, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches) of which they are members. Religious diversity and change is reflected also in the growth of the “religious unaffiliated” group, a category with which 5.8 percent of all adults identify. But even these respondents claimed that “religion,” not necessarily a

Christian religion, is “somewhat important” or “very important.” More than 10 percent of all adults claimed they were not religious; 4 percent identified themselves as “atheist” or “agnostic” and 6.3 percent as “secular unaffiliated.”¹³

Christians in the United States are marked by variations in some demographic characteristics across denominations. Members of Protestant mainline churches, for example, seem to have higher incomes and education levels than members of Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches, as shown in Table 2.

These communities have substantially higher incomes and education levels than members of historically black churches. The percentage of people 50 and older in mainline and evangelical Protestant congregations is also somewhat higher than those of historically black and Catholic congregations.

The four Christian communities depicted in Table 2 are not diverse with regard to race. Mainline Protestant churches are overwhelmingly white, and historically black Protestant churches are overwhelmingly black. Evangelical Protestant churches also are overwhelmingly white, but they do have larger percentages of black and Latino members. The Catholic Church is more diverse than the Protestant churches with its large Hispanic population, but it has few black members.

Progressive, Moderate, and Conservative Perspectives

The Christian response to the shifts in American culture that accelerated in the 1960s has been the topic of considerable discussion in religious, academic, and political circles. Three distinct, though not mutually exclusive, strains were discernible by the 1980s. These progressive, moderate, and conservative perspectives are represented in Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox denominations across America today.

Christian Progressives

Christian progressives are in the minority, and they represent the sharpest break with the orthodox belief system. “Orthodoxy,” as retired Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong says, “does not mean that this point of view is true; it only means that this point of view won!”¹⁴ They question (a) orthodox concepts of the Trinitarian Godhead, of Jesus and his ministry, (b) orthodox responses to

Table 2. Demographics of Four Christian Communities, in Percent (2008)

Demographic Variable	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Historically Black Protestant	Catholic
Age				
<i>18–29</i>	17	14	24	18
<i>30–49</i>	39	36	36	41
<i>50–64</i>	26	28	24	24
<i>65 and over</i>	19	23	15	16
Race				
<i>White</i>	81	91	2	65
<i>Black</i>	6	2	92	2
<i>Latino</i>	7	3	4	29
<i>Asian</i>	2	1	0	0
Education				
<i>Less than high school</i>	16	8	19	17
<i>High school graduate</i>	40	34	40	36
<i>Some college</i>	24	24	25	21
<i>College graduate</i>	13	20	11	16
<i>Postgraduate</i>	7	14	5	10
Income				
<i>Less than \$30,000</i>	34	25	47	31
<i>\$30,000–>\$50,000</i>	24	21	26	20
<i>\$50,000–>\$100,000</i>	29	33	19	30
<i>\$100,000 plus</i>	13	21	8	19

Source: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, June 23, 2008, <http://religions.pewforum.org>, 39, 44, 56, 60.

scriptural authority, (c) orthodox interpretations of the early history of Christianity, and (d) orthodox perspectives on politics and patriotism in America.

They argue that the meaning of who Jesus was and what he said and did was contested for centuries, and remains contested to this day. Scholars have shown that scribes inserted orthodox statements into many biblical texts in the centuries before the New Testament was

codified, beginning with the gospel texts themselves. Indeed, there are so many variations in ancient manuscripts that it is impossible to recreate the original text for any book in the New Testament. In essence, Christian orthodoxy as we know it today is the product of the early church fathers.¹⁵

Christian progressives see the Bible as a human document and the New Testament as the human witness in words to Jesus's understanding of God. Both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible consist of literary and historical texts, whose authors are unknown, and these texts must be examined critically using strategies and techniques developed over the past 200 years or so. While most biblical scholars agree that Jesus was a real human being who died about 30 CE, the quest to reconstruct the Jesus of history has proved futile. Progressives believe there was never an original biblical text and there was never an original Christianity. The Bible may be *an* authority for guidance—although many progressives would deny that the Bible is an authority—but not for specific direction in living the Christian life. The Bible alone cannot be a template for living in today's world.

These theologians have constructed a more nuanced appreciation of the origins and early history of Christianity that they argue forms *part* of the context for the debate about the meaning of Christianity. The development of orthodox doctrines and an established canon has a distinct historical, linguistic, and etiological or causal trajectory that has influenced our understanding of how and why the orthodox Christian message came to be.

Several contemporary biblical scholars, for example, have demonstrated that the life and message of Jesus were framed in both oral and written tradition through the sacred writings, liturgies, and expectations of first-century Judaism. The memory of Jesus as depicted in the gospels is not a historical narrative of his life but an interpretive reconstruction shaped largely by the biblical traditions of the Jewish faith. Jesus was a Jew. This Christian stance fully privileges the Judeo in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which has some profound implications for later Christian doctrine.¹⁶

They also challenge the mindset that gives rise to the dichotomous language that is characteristic of Christian orthodoxy. Such language includes opposites such as heaven versus hell, good versus bad, and saved versus unsaved. This language inevitably privileges the orthodox and condemns heresy. This mindset, which progressives say misinterprets the Jesus Way, leads to banishment from the Christian community and consignment after death to what conservatives define as hell.

They are sensitive to the reality that all of us bring a host of perspectives to bear on such terms as faith and sin and even God, perspectives that help determine how we understand these terms.

Christian progressives are generally inclusive in responding to America's contemporary culture. They do not believe Christianity is the only path to God's grace. They believe that Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and other faith traditions; Christians who do not believe as Christian conservatives do; and even persons of no religious faith can experience the Kingdom of God.

They subscribe to what Deepak Chopra, the celebrated writer and metaphysician of spirituality, calls the "third Jesus" that "we cannot ignore"—the Jesus beyond the mythical Jesus of history and the Jesus of Christian dogma.¹⁷ This Jesus, as Bishop Spong puts it, is beyond "creeds, doctrines and dogmas," and beyond the "tribal boundaries" of human "theistic" definitions of God. Spong cites the words of the Christian martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), who said that to be a Christian "is not to be a religious human being: it is to be a whole human being. Jesus is the portrait of that wholeness."¹⁸ This is not what the media sometimes refer to as liberal Christians or the religious Left but a religious stance that locates God's image in all of humanity—and beyond.

Christian progressives reacted much earlier and more strenuously than mainstream Christianity to the role of Christian conservatives in American political culture. They saw more clearly perhaps than other Christians how strict adherence to orthodox Christian doctrine helped generate a Christian conservative mindset that they perceive has had a devastating impact on American political, social, economic, scientific, and religious life for at least a generation. Progressive perspectives have played at best a marginal role in public debates about the role of religion in American political life, but that is the subject for another book.

Christian Moderates

Christian moderates constitute the mainstream Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholic (post-Vatican II) churches in America. They may recite the Nicene Creed, for example, on a given Sunday, but individual members may also interpret the Bible through Enlightenment lenses and doubt or even reject aspects of orthodox theology, such as Jesus's virgin birth or the sinfulness of

humanity as the fundamental human condition. Most accept, however, the authority of orthodox doctrine.

Many moderates are as saddened as heartened by the recorded Christian tradition—by what they see has been done and is being done in the name of Christianity. They accept that biblical authors were human, but they see the Bible as God’s Word to humanity. They also accept the Bible as *an* authority for personal guidance but not necessarily for specific direction in living the Christian life. They embrace the progressive quest to find the earliest versions of biblical texts in the belief that these writings will be closer to the authors’ original intent.

Moderates, often conflated with progressives in the liberal pantheon by religious conservatives, probably exhibit the widest range of theological perspectives. The varieties of religious experience within this community are reflected in a survey conducted in 2005 by Baylor University in Waco, Texas, an institution affiliated to the Southern Baptists. Demonstrating that “under the surface” American Christianity is “startlingly complex and diverse,” the survey among other measures provided a revealing snapshot of how Americans conceive of God. While most Americans do agree that God exists, they do not agree about “what God is like, what God wants in the world, or how God feels about politics.”¹⁹

Most of the 1,721 respondents who participated in the survey held a view of God that fit one of four basic types. Slightly more than 31 percent had what the researchers called a Type A view of God, who is authoritarian, angry, and punishing, but who helps them in decision making, and was active both in individual lives and in the wider world. About 23 percent held what they called a Type B view of God, who is benevolent and more forgiving, an active and positive influence in individual lives and in the wider world. About 16 percent held what they called a Type C view of God, who is critical and not pleased with what is happening in the world, but who is nevertheless not actively engaged in the world (divine justice will be meted out in another life). Slightly more than 24 percent held what they called a Type D view of God, who is distant and indifferent, neither benevolent nor judgmental nor active in human affairs, but who is a kind of transcendental force that sets the laws of nature in motion.

Members of the same churches often held different concepts of God, which suggests at least a partial explanation for enduring tensions over orthodox doctrine within all three categories of Christians. The four-type God model was also somewhat predictive of political

and social attitudes. Evangelical Protestants (about 35 percent of the respondents were white) and African-American Protestants (evangelicals constituted 72 percent of this population) were most inclined to see God as authoritarian and to find abortion and gay marriage, for example, as “always wrong.”

Christian moderates wrestle with contemporary social issues because, above all, the religious perspectives of their denominational affiliations do not necessarily drive their personal political, economic, and social perspectives. They are more open to an inclusive, egalitarian society than their counterparts were in previous generations, but responses to specific social issues are often diverse and even contradictory, both within and among specific denominations.

Most moderates accept scientific evolution—finally established as official Catholic Church doctrine in 1996, for example, by the late Pope John Paul II (1920–2005)—but some sympathize with the teaching of intelligent design alongside scientific evolution in the classroom. Some distinguish between gay civil rights, which they support, and gay marriage rights, which they oppose. While some moderates believe early-stage embryos are human and must be protected against stem cell research and cloning, others join Orthodox Jews, who accept “the moral status of the pre-embryo as less than fully human” and “endorse a range of stem-cell research that involves therapeutic cloning.”²⁰ While the mass media seldom have provided the kind of coverage that reflects these ambiguities, the majority of Christians in America today are Christian moderates. In America’s present political culture, they could with justification be called swing voters.

Christian Conservatives

Christian conservatives, the focus of this book, demonstrate the most rigid support of the orthodox belief system. Indeed, they adhere to an interpretation of orthodox doctrine that in some ways is distinctly American in origin. They insist that God intervened in the human story once and for all time in the person of Jesus The Christ, the personal savior of humankind. Eternal salvation for these Christians is possible only for those who accept The Word as expressed in biblical texts (such as John 1:1–4).²¹ This perspective frames all other expressions of Christian belief and behavior.

Christian conservatives generally believe the Bible is inspired directly by God, biblical writings are inerrant and infallible (free of

error), and the believer must read the Bible literally (using acceptable translations such as the Authorized King James Version or the New International Version). Orthodox doctrine is accepted without question, because they believe these creeds are centered in the Bible. The Bible was *the* authority for living the Christian life in the past, and it remains *the* authority for living the Christian life today.

Orthodox theology as interpreted by many Christian conservatives, moreover, is tied inextricably to a range of political, social, and economic values that they define as components of an orthodox Christian perspective. Conservative theology and political philosophy, church-state relations, heterosexual domestic marriage and family life, the capitalist free-enterprise system, and the meaning of patriotism are among the components of a distinctly American form of Christian conservative orthodoxy.

As we shall outline in subsequent chapters, the portrait of American life that emerges from this worldview constitutes the key religious component of the conservative coalition in Republican Party (GOP) politics. Christian conservatives have wielded enormous power within the coalition because they help determine (a) which issues will be emphasized and which will not, (b) the positions other conservative coalition members take on these issues, and (c) who will be the GOP standard-bearers in national, state, and local elections.

Christian conservative orthodoxy has also generated and continues to generate tensions *within* conservative coalition politics. Tensions may be heightened, for example, when Christian conservatives use their elected or appointed positions to impose their religious values on the larger society (as when a school board votes to have sex abstinence or intelligent design taught in health and biology classes), or when Christian leaders try to blackmail public officials to vote in particular ways (as when a Catholic bishop urges congregants to vote against abortion candidates or orders a local priest to withhold Holy Communion from a public servant who will not use his position to oppose abortion). These tensions are important for understanding today's Christian conservative challenge.

Christian conservatives are the counterparts in many ways to Christian progressives. Both perspectives represent minority views within the American Christian population as a whole, but Christian conservatives are generally narrow in their vision of how God is revealed in the world and narrow in their response to contemporary cultural politics. Although the Christian conservative community is not a monolithic force, many Christian conservatives do demonstrate the habit

of mind, as religion scholar Martin E. Marty and historian R. Scott Appleby once put it, of “beleaguered believers.” While this is a reference to the evangelical fundamentalist core of this religious community, it also manifests a conservative state of mind that is broader than the need “to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group.”²²

The cliché that the most segregated time of the week is in church on a Sunday morning remains a reality for all so-called racial or ethnic groups in America.²³ But white Christians in monoracial churches, especially Protestant conservatives, constitute the religious bedrock of Christian conservatism today. They conform in many respects to an expanded WASP label (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant-Catholic-Eastern Orthodox). Mass media’s coverage of the role of religion in contemporary politics, moreover, has focused overwhelmingly on these Christian conservative perspectives.

CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Christians and non-Christians have long argued about the extent to which organized religion should be involved in politics—some suggesting that religious groups and individuals have an *obligation* to participate in politics and some maintaining that *any* participation is inappropriate. One finds a myriad of attitudes between these dichotomous positions, as shown in Table 3, which reports results from a 2004 national survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Members of several religious traditions were represented in this survey, but three major Christian communities in America—evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants, and Roman Catholics—were identified. Christians within these three communities (all white adults) were further subdivided into traditionalist, centrist, or modernist—a political distinction that parallels the theological distinction we have made among Christian conservatives (traditionalists), moderates (centrists), and progressives (modernists). Traditionalists identified with the highest levels, modernists with the lowest levels, and centrists with medium levels of religious engagement (based on a range of variables such as church attendance). Traditionalists are characterized by more orthodox beliefs, modernists by more heterodox beliefs, and centrists by a combination of orthodox and heterodox beliefs.²⁴

The divisions among the three main white religious communities were most prominent in response to the question, “Organized

religious groups should stay out of politics.” A mean of 67.3 percent of the traditionalists within each of these groups *disagreed* that organized religion should stay out of politics, as shown in Table 3. The major ethnic Christian minority communities—black Protestants, Latino Protestants, and Latino Catholics—also supported religious participation in politics. The modernists in these communities *agreed* by a mean of 59.3 percent that religious groups should *not* be involved in politics. Other religious constituencies also agreed by a majority in all cases that religious groups should stay out of politics. The centrists were more or less evenly divided.

The volatility of Christian views about the acceptability of mixing religion and politics is reflected in the latest survey results by the Pew Center. While 28 percent of *all* white, evangelical Protestants said churches should keep out of politics in 2004, 39 percent expressed that view in 2008. Sixty percent of white, non-Hispanic Catholics said churches should stay out of politics in 2004, compared to 59 percent in 2008. Twenty-four percent of *Republicans* who attend church weekly said in 2004 that churches should keep out of politics (compared to 48 percent who attend less frequently), and 43 percent who attend weekly said in 2008 that churches should keep out of politics (compared to 59 percent who attend less often).²⁵

Christian views about the religion-politics relationship, however, apparently are more complex than these survey data suggest. A study by the Pew Research Center in 2007 shows 90 percent of evangelical Protestants “completely agree” or “mostly agree” that it is important for a president to have strong religious beliefs, compared to 66 percent for mainline Protestants, and 70 percent for Catholics. Nevertheless, 53 percent of evangelical Protestants, 68 percent of mainline Protestants, and 68 percent of white, non-Hispanic Catholics *disagreed* that churches should endorse political candidates. These opinions may have been influenced by the fact that federal law prohibits tax-exempt groups from opposing or supporting political candidates.²⁶

Some who agree that it is appropriate for religious groups to participate in politics are activists, and it seems reasonable to assume that the ranks of Christian conservative activists are filled primarily by traditionalists in evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic denominations. If this assumption is accurate, the 2004 survey suggests that perhaps 15 percent (based on the percentage of those traditionalist respondents who agreed that religious groups should *be* in politics) are potential political activists. This excludes centrists and modernists within these communities, individuals within other

Table 3. American Views of Political Activism by Religious Affiliation (2004)

Question: Organized religious groups should stay out of politics, in percent			
Religion	Percentage of Population	Agree	Disagree
Evangelical Protestant	26.3	35	65
<i>Traditionalist</i>	12.6	25	75
<i>Centrist</i>	10.8	43	57
<i>Modernist</i>	2.9	53	47
Mainline Protestant	16.0	48	52
<i>Traditionalist</i>	4.3	35	65
<i>Centrist</i>	7.0	49	51
<i>Modernist</i>	4.7	61	39
Latino Protestant	2.8	40	60
Black Protestant	9.6	35	65
Catholic	17.5	52	48
<i>Traditionalist</i>	4.4	38	62
<i>Centrist</i>	8.1	53	47
<i>Modernist</i>	5.0	64	36
Latino Catholic	4.5	40	60
Other Christians	2.7	57	43
Other Faiths	2.7	60	40
Jewish	1.9	57	43
Unaffiliated	16.0	64	36
<i>Unaffiliated Believer</i>	5.3	53	47
<i>Secular</i>	7.5	68	32
<i>Atheist, Agnostic</i>	3.2	74	26

Source: John C. Green, *The American Religious Landscape and Political Attitudes: A Baseline for 2004* (Akron, OH: University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, 2004). Survey cosponsored by Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, <http://pewforum.org/docs/index.php?DocID=55>.

religious groups, and nonreligious respondents who might also be political activists.

Christian traditionalists—what we are referring to as Christian conservatives—are most likely to be political activists: these Christians are most likely to campaign and to vote for conservative candidates and issues. They serve conservative political causes by writing letters to editors and officials, marching in demonstrations, making speeches, filing lawsuits, posting photographs of women entering abortion clinics, and working in political campaigns.

Most Christian conservatives, however, are not political activists. They support and oppose causes primarily by voting, and like all Americans, they are subjected to a sometimes-bewildering array of choices. These choices generate a variety of diverse and sometimes unpredictable responses, as suggested by their attitudes toward social issues.

Diverse Views of Social Issues

Evangelical Protestants and other Christian conservatives often are referred to as social conservatives, in part because many do take a high-profile conservative stance on issues such as abortion, the death penalty, prayer in schools, and using fetal stem cells in medical research. The only statement a majority in the religious community could agree on in the 2004 Pew Forum survey (Table 4) was one supporting government aid for the disadvantaged—57 percent of all respondents agreed on this issue. There was also wide support for the death penalty. Fifty-nine percent of white evangelical Protestants, however, disagreed with the statement, “The death penalty for convicted murderers should be replaced with life in prison without parole.” Only 34 percent of black Protestants disagreed and 53 percent of Catholics disagreed.²⁷

There were important differences between Protestant and Catholic traditionalists and centrists on most of the remaining issues. Protestants and Catholic traditionalists stood out in rejecting same-sex marriage. Evangelical Protestants and Catholics also stood out for supporting bans on fetal stem cell research, and they had the highest percentages of respondents (along with “other Christians,” mainly Mormons) who believed that abortions should always be illegal. Modernists in each of the three dominant white Christian communities

Table 4. Religious Responses to Six Social Issues, in Percent (2004)

Faith Group	Agree Abortion Always Illegal	Agree to Ban Fetal Stem Cell Research	Replace Death Penalty with Life Sentence	Support Same- Sex Marriage	Support Gay Rights	Government Must Help Disadvantaged
Traditionalist						
<i>Evangelical Protestant</i>	32	50	25	3	36	52
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>	8	33	36	10	44	56
<i>Catholic</i>	26	51	33	11	51	52
Centrist						
<i>Evangelical Protestant</i>	19	34	26	17	50	57
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>	7	28	27	27	62	47
<i>Catholic</i>	12	32	27	29	59	59
Modernist						
<i>Evangelical Protestant</i>	7	22	32	34	63	62
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>	2	12	39	38	73	55
<i>Catholic</i>	3	15	34	51	83	53
Latino Protestant	22	35	49	20	47	65

Table 4 (continued)

Faith Group	Agree Abortion Always Illegal	Agree to Ban Fetal Stem Cell Research	Replace Death Penalty with Life Sentence	Support Same- Sex Marriage	Support Gay Rights	Government Must Help Disadvantaged
Black Protestant	21	47	34	18	40	60
Latino Catholic	18	33	44	34	61	60
Other Christian	35	34	32	15	41	52
Other Faiths	3	18	41	50	68	67
Jewish	0	9	49	55	82	72
Unaffiliated Believers	13	33	30	32	57	62
Secular	5	14	31	53	79	62
Atheist, Agnostic	0	5	39	72	89	64

Source: John C. Green, *The American Religious Landscape and Political Attitudes: A Baseline for 2004* (Akron, OH: University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, 2004), 28, 40, 43, 45. Survey cosponsored by Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, <http://pewforum.org/docs/index.php?DocID=55>.

were at variance with traditionalists in all social categories except for the death penalty and government aid to the disadvantaged.

Pew's 2007 survey suggests the view of social issues by Christians who attend church at least once a week is somewhat different from those who attend less frequently. Eighty-eight percent of white evangelical Protestants who attend church weekly, for example, opposed gay marriage, compared to 69 percent of those who attend less frequently. Fifty-nine percent of Catholics (and 58 percent of white mainline Protestants) who attend at least weekly opposed gay marriage, compared to 42 percent (and 44 percent) who attend less frequently. Results are similar for using fetal stem cells in medical research. Sixty-eight percent of white evangelicals who attend church at least weekly opted to save the stem cells, compared to 37 percent who attend less often. Forty-six percent of white, non-Hispanic Catholics who attend Mass at least weekly opted for preserving stem cells, compared to 22 percent for those attending less often.²⁸

Attitude Changes over Time

Two contentious social issues, abortion and gay rights, illustrate the unpredictability of Christian voting patterns between the 1992 and 2004 national elections. Opposition to abortion rights has steadily increased within the religious community, the Pew Forum surveys suggest. Anti-abortion positions for the evangelical Protestant community, which stood at 56 percent in the 1992 survey, had increased to 69 percent by the 2004 survey, and similar increases occurred among black Protestants (to 54 percent from 46 percent), white Catholics (to 48 percent from 40 percent), and Latino Catholics (to 57 percent from 47 percent).

Only Christian modernists and the Jewish community became less enamored with anti-abortion positions during this period. Jewish responses to this issue declined to 16 percent from 20 percent—reflecting the 2004 survey, in which none of the Jewish respondents (along with atheists and agnostics) agreed that abortions should always be illegal. Anti-abortion advocates among religious communities overall rose to 48 percent in 2004 from 40 percent in 1992, a net increase of 8 percentage points.²⁹

Attitudes toward gay rights showed the opposite trend in the Pew Forum surveys. Given the question that “homosexuals should have the same rights as other Americans,” even evangelical Protestants as

a whole recorded an increase of 10 percentage points between 1992 (35 percent) and 2004 (45 percent). Mainline Protestant support increased by 5 percentage points (to 60 percent), Roman Catholic support by 7 percentage points (to 64 percent), Latino Catholic support by 5 percentage points (to 61 percent), and Jewish support by 14 percentage points (to 82 percent). Support by the religiously “unaffiliated” increased by 16 percentage points (to 73 percent) in 2004. The only negative view on gay rights was in the black Protestant category, in which support decreased by a remarkable 19 percentage points between the 1992 (59 percent) and 2004 (40 percent) surveys.³⁰

Personal views, of course, change as new issues and problems emerge. Polling just prior to the 2008 election suggests that the economy was the number one concern for white, non-Hispanic Catholic voters who attend Mass weekly, and the number two concern for white evangelical Protestants who attend church weekly. Terrorism was the number two concern for these Catholic voters, and moral values was the number one concern for white evangelical Protestants who attend church weekly. Abortion was number 10, and gay marriage was number 12 for evangelicals; abortion was number 10 for Catholic voters, and gay marriage was number 12.³¹

Religious Affiliation and Party Membership

Forty-two percent of Americans who claimed religious affiliations in 2004 were self-described Democrats and 38 percent were self-described Republicans—a ratio that had not changed since 1992.³² Nevertheless, the figures had changed dramatically among some Christian conservative groups, which were indeed partially responsible for a rightward drift in U.S. politics in the 2004 national elections, as suggested in Table 5.

Evangelical Protestants made the most dramatic shift regardless of their level of religious engagement: while they favored Republicans (48 percent) over Democrats (32 percent) in 1992, the ratio had widened considerably by 2004 with 56 percent favoring Republicans and 27 percent Democrats. Roman Catholic voting patterns, once a majority Democratic constituency, have also been shifting toward the Republicans. Democratic loyalties (44 percent) were nearly on a par with Republican loyalties (41 percent) in 2004.

Table 5. Religious Preference and Party Affiliations, in Percent (2004)*

	2004		1992–2004 Net Change	
	Republican	Democrat	Republican	Democrat
Evangelical Protestant	56	27	+8	–5
Mainline Protestant	44	39	–6	+7
Black Protestant	11	71	+1	–6
Roman Catholic	41	44	+3	+1
Latino Catholic	15	61	–7	+12
Jewish	21	68	+3	+23
Unaffiliated	27	43	–3	+2

*Independents were omitted from this presentation.

Source: John C. Green, *The American Religious Landscape and Political Attitudes: A Baseline for 2004* (Akron, OH: University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, 2004), 9. Survey cosponsored by The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, <http://pewforum.org/docs/index.php?DocID=55>.

Democratic gains have been most noticeable, according to these surveys, among mainline Protestants (narrowing the Republican majority, which stood at 50 percent in 1992 to 44 percent in 2004), Latino Catholics, Jewish, and religious “unaffiliated” voters. The traditionalists in the three major faith communities—evangelical Protestant (70 percent), mainline Protestant (59 percent), and Catholic (57 percent) Christians—stood out as the leaders in terms of Republican partisanship in 2004.³³

Democrats had scored some gains at the Republicans' expense by late 2007. Thirty-four percent of Protestant evangelicals said they were Democrats or leaned toward the Democratic Party (as opposed to 50 percent for the Republicans), compared to 43 percent of mainline church members (41 percent for the Republicans), 78 percent of black church members (10 percent for the Republicans), and 48 percent of Catholics (33 percent for the Republicans). Republicans lost strength, and Democrats gained support among all religious groups except evangelicals.³⁴

The Democratic Party was perceived to be far less friendly toward religion in general than the Republican Party—a precipitous drop to 29 percent in 2005, for example, from 40 percent in 2004 and 42 percent in 2003. The majority of respondents (55 percent) felt the Republican Party was friendlier toward religion. Respondents overall said Republicans were most concerned about protecting religious values—the margin was 51 percent Republican and 28 percent Democratic in 2005. But respondents also said Democrats were most concerned about “protecting the freedom of citizens to make personal choices”—the margin being almost identically reversed with 52 percent Democratic and 30 percent Republican in 2005.³⁵

THE CONSERVATIVE COALITION

The seeds of the conservative coalition, as we define the term, were planted even before the 1960s, but the coalition emerged as a potent political force essentially during the 1970s and 1980s and consolidated its gains in the 1990s. It began losing some of this force during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The coalition developed in three steps, beginning with Christian conservatives, who formed the largest segment of this coalition. A driving force behind the Christian conservative movement was Protestant evangelical fundamentalism—a force that has a distinct historical and ecclesiastical trajectory in the United States.

The second step was the effort by Protestant conservative activists to forge alliances with like-minded conservatives in nonconformist Protestant communities (especially the Mormons), in non-Protestant Christian communities (especially the Roman Catholics), and in some non-Christian communities (especially Orthodox Jews), as struggles over various religious-cum-social issues, the so-called culture wars, intensified.

The third step was the attempt by secular conservatives—politicians whose understanding of conservatism is not driven by perceptions of divine intent—to tap into these alienated religious communities. These conservatives—composed initially of traditionalists with a later infusion of so-called neoconservatives—have been associated with the Republican Party for at least 50 years.

Some traditionalist conservatives adhered to the historic themes of political conservatism—limited government, free markets, and a balanced budget—but the neoconservatives in positions of influence

during and after the Reagan era were more concerned about issues relating to the economy, the military establishment, and America's post-Cold War role in international affairs. While they might have had few if any religious convictions, these secular fundamentalists recognized much earlier than their Democratic counterparts that religious groups constituted a vast, alienated, and largely underutilized source of new recruits for the Republican Party.³⁶

GOD IN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER

Christian conservatives comprise the core of a coalition of religious and secular interest groups determined to shape public policy, and in the process they have left an indelible mark on America's political culture. Protestant conservatives are the dominant religious force in the conservative coalition, and this study begins by framing the history of this movement in the context of changes in America's economy, knowledge industry, and society over the past century or so. Protestant conservatives—however diverse members were in terms of motives and interests—were unquestionably the most significant constituency in the Republican Party by the last decades of the twentieth century (Chapter 1).

Second, we describe some of the ways in which Christian conservatives use various media of communication to promote the gospel of Christian conservatism. They exercise power within Christian communities, for example, by using church-controlled media, influencing seminary curricula, and disseminating religious materials with orthodox interpretations of scripture and church history. Nevertheless, these activists would not have succeeded as well as they did without their ownership of and/or influence over commercial as well as noncommercial media to disseminate their ideas to broader audiences.

Mainstream media coverage of religion became more critical with the emergence of a conservative religious coalition during the latter part of the twentieth century, but the kind of skepticism journalists typically brought to their interactions with politicians and other partisan sources remained relatively rare in their coverage of religion news. The emergence of an independent conservative media establishment in America in the past 35 years or so—and Christian conservatives have been in the forefront of these developments—had an enormous impact on the framing of a conservative mindset in America's political culture (Chapter 2).

Third, we explore the meaning of political conservatism and profile the conservative mindset in America today. Conservatives tend to resist change, yearn for an imagined state of affairs that they believe once constituted the *status quo* in America, and accept the view that societies are invariably hierarchical. The last point suggests for conservatives that freedom takes precedence over equality, because they are convinced wealth and power cannot be shared equally. The conservative mindset is also characterized by certain psychological tendencies—tendencies toward authoritarianism and intolerance of ambiguity, and the need to seek closure (Chapter 3).

Fourth, we examine the limits of religious power in America's political culture today. Though formidable, Christian conservatives are still constrained by constitutional and federal case law—even though the activities of the George W. Bush White House may seem to blur traditional distinctions between church and state. No consensus has emerged within the Christian majority about what role if any religion should play in civil society (Chapter 4).

Fifth, we demonstrate, using five contemporary issues, the ways in which Christian conservative activists gain and exercise political power through elective and appointive positions. We decided to focus on predominately national, rather than international, issues and on issues that provoke conflict within conservative religious communities. Each issue exhibits a broader context and generates enduring tensions that are explored in the chapter.

Chapter 5 first describes the power of patriarchy and religion in the construction and maintenance of sex and gender models and then explores the controversies about abortion and contraception. Chapter 6 focuses on gay marriage and family rights. Chapter 7 probes the battle over the teaching of scientific evolution and intelligent design in the context of the campaign to transform public school education. Chapter 8 considers the response to terrorism just before the invasion of Afghanistan, and Chapter 9 examines the run-up to the war in Iraq in the context of what has now been stereotyped as the war against terrorism.

We conclude this book by revisiting the cumulative impact of the conservative religious voice on public policies today. The conservative political coalition began to fracture even before George W. Bush started his second term in 2004 and accelerated after the election. We end with some thoughts about what a Christian stance in American politics might look like now and in the future (Chapter 10).

NOTES

1. D. G. Hart, "Conservatism, the Protestant Right, and the Failure of Religious History," *The Journal of the Historical Society* 4, no. 4 (2004): 447–493, p. 465.

2. The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican was opened in 1962 by Pope John XXIII and was closed in 1965 by Pope Paul VI. "Cover Story: Vatican II; 40 Years Later," *National Catholic Reporter Online*, undated, www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives/100402/vaticanII.htm.

3. An estimated 31 million Catholics, for example, voted in the 2004 presidential election: 16 million Catholics (52 percent of the total Catholic vote and 56 percent of the white Catholic vote) voted for George W. Bush. An estimated 21 million Protestant evangelicals (78 percent of the white evangelical vote) voted for this candidate. Richard N. Ostling, "The 2004 Election Reinforced America's Religious and Moral Divide," *Standard Times*, November 4, 2004, at <http://archive.southcoasttoday.com/daily/11-04/11-05-04/a02wn865.htm>. Ostling is the Associated Press's religion writer.

4. The critique of the conservative religious presence in America's contemporary political culture has become virtually a cottage industry. Three recent books suggest the range of responses to this challenge. Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006); Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (New York: Free Press, 2006); Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century* (New York: Viking, 2006). For an uncritical but scholarly reading in support of the new religious establishment, see D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

5. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), 164.

6. See Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), especially 27–28 (on the Nicene Creed).

7. The U.S. census does not include a religious profile of the American population, so surveys on religion in America are conducted by nongovernmental agencies.

8. Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey," Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, 2008, <http://religions.pewforum.org>. The telephone survey (including 500 respondents who had cell phones only) was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates from May 8 to August 13, 2007. The survey was not bilingual in that most interviewers could not speak Spanish. Households identified in an initial call as non-English speaking were contacted later by an interviewer who could speak Spanish.

9. The Pew Research Center conducted random-digit, nationwide telephone interviews with 2,041 adults, including an over-sample of 197 African Americans, in March 5–18, 2001. The margin of error was plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, “Faith-Based Funding Backed, But Church-State Doubts Abound,” Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, April 10, 2001, <http://people-press.org/report/15/faith-based-funding-backed-but-church-state-doubts-abound> (introduction and summary) and <http://people-press.org/report/?pageid=117> (survey methodology).

10. America’s religious stance is relatively strong, however, only in relation to other nations deemed to be developed. In a 2002 survey, 59 percent of U.S. respondents claimed religion was “very important” in their lives. The combined average of selected countries in Europe, Canada, South Korea, and Japan was 23 percent—Poland being closest to the United States in the “developed” group with 36 percent. Religion, however, would seem to be a dominant factor in the lives of the vast majority of the world’s population living in the so-called emerging or developing nations. Respondents in selected countries of Africa (average of 87 percent), Asia (77 percent), and Latin America (65 percent) reacted even more positively to this question than U.S. respondents. The Pew Research Center interviewed 38,263 people in the 44-nation survey, and the questionnaire was translated into 46 languages and dialects. The religion component was part of a Pew Global Attitudes Project entitled, “What The World Thinks in 2002.” Respondents were asked the following religion question: “How important is religion in your life—very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?” The data were collected in July–October 2002. The margins of error, depending on the nation, ranged from 1.8 to 4.4 percentage points. “Among Wealthy Nations, U.S. Stands Alone in Its Embrace of Religion,” Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, Washington, DC, December 19, 2002, <http://people-press.org/report/15/faith-based-funding-backed-but-church-state-doubts-abound> (introduction and summary).

11. “U.S. Religious Landscape,” 5. For a list of Protestant denominations by family and tradition, see pp. 103–107.

12. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

13. *Ibid.*, 5. For figures in other surveys on respondents declaring they were not affiliated to any religion, see fn. 19 below and Chapter 1, fn. 30.

14. John Shelby Spong, “The Rise of Fundamentalism, Part I: Fundamentalism’s Roots,” March 7, 2007, unpublished article, https://secure.agoramedia.com/manage_spong.asp (requires registration and fee). Spong and numerous other religious scholars have been arguing for many years for a new paradigm—see, for example, Spong’s, *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith Is Dying and How a New Faith Is Being Born* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001)—that in part calls for a non-theistic God, a God freed of much that has been traditionally defined as the

doctrinal content of the Christian faith. Methodist Bishop of Chicago C. Joseph Sprague—to take another example—has said much the same thing in claiming, “Jesus the Messiah, the Christ of God, Was Fully Human,” *United Methodist Reporter*, November 8, 2002.

15. See, for example, Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). As Ehrman puts it, “[T]here are more differences among our [biblical] manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.” Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 10.

16. The literature on Jesus in the context of the Judaism of his day has also become a cottage industry for Jewish as well as Christian scholars. Geza Vermes is one of the early interpreters, and his book, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1973), is a classic text in the field. See also Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006); and John Shelby Spong, *Jesus for the Non-Religious: Recovering the Divine at the Heart of the Human* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), Part 2 (chapters 12–18).

17. Chopra describes the “third” Jesus as a man whose spiritual teachings guide and inspire men and women, not just Christians, to experience God personally. The first Jesus is the historical Jesus, the “rabbi who wandered the shores of northern Galilee many centuries ago,” who “intended to save the world by showing others the path to God-consciousness,” and who has been “swept away by history.” Millions worship the second Jesus, but he never existed and he “doesn’t even lay claim to the fleeting substance of the first Jesus. This is the Jesus built up over thousands of years by theologians and other scholars. . . . This second Jesus cannot be embraced without embracing theology first.” Chopra argues that Christianity should embrace the third Jesus; it should be inclusive, not exclusive, and it should strive to encourage individual spiritual growth and insight. See Deepak Chopra, *The Third Jesus: The Christ We Cannot Ignore* (New York: Harmony, 2008), 8–10.

18. Spong, *Jesus for the Non-Religious*, 137, 204, 213–214, 263, 275. As Spong says, “I am elated to discern that theism is nothing more than a human definition of God and that atheism is simply the denial of that human definition” (133).

19. Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, “American Piety in the 21st Century: New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the U.S.,” unpublished report, September 6, 2006, www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/33304.pdf. And 10.8 percent of the respondents claimed they were “truly unaffiliated”—having no interest in or ties to religion. The survey utilized a mixed-mode sampling design (telephone and self-administered mailed surveys) and demographic measures as well as religion measures. It was administered by the Gallup organization. The questionnaire (with 77 questions and almost 400 possible responses) was the

most nuanced and most detailed of any religious survey the authors have seen. The Baylor study offered 16 words to characterize God and provided 10 descriptions relating to God's involvement in the world. The margin of error was plus or minus 4 percentage points.

20. William A. Galston, "Catholics, Jews & Stem Cells: When Believers Beg to Differ," *Commonweal*, May 20, 2005, 13–17, p. 16.

21. John 1:1–4: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

22. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalism and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance*, Vol. 3, The Fundamentalism Project (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3.

23. Most Protestants—indeed, most Christians—reside in segregated congregations. About 7 percent of America's congregations—and less than 5 percent of Protestant congregations—are multiracial (no ethnic group is 80 percent or more of the total congregation). Tara Dooley, "A Mix in Faith: Fort Bend Church Eschews Ethnicity in Favor of Outreach to Community," *Houston Chronicle*, May 22, 2004, E1, E4.

24. Progressive (modernist) and moderate (centrist) Christians, of course, are also actively engaged in political as well as religious activities, but they are a minority within these constituencies. Green and his colleagues surveyed 4,000 randomly selected adults representing 18 Christian communities (with a margin of error plus or minus 2 percentage points). The questions used in developing these subcategories (questions relating to religious belief and behavior) were combined in a single religious scale—from the lowest to the highest levels of religious engagement. The pollsters decided that the Jewish faith should be identified independently of other, non-Christian faiths.

25. The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, *More Americans Question Religion's Role in Politics*, Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, August 21, 2008, <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=337>. Thirty-seven percent of Republicans said in 2004 that churches should stay out of politics, compared to 51 percent in 2008. Results, based on a nationwide sample of 2,905 adults, were gathered July 31–August 10, 2008. The margin of error was plus or minus 2 percentage points.

26. The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, "Religion in Campaign '08: Clinton and Giuliani Seen as Not Highly Religious; Romney's Religion Raises Concerns," Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, September 6, 2007, <http://pewforum.org/surveys/campaign08>. Pew surveyed 3,002 adults in this random sample during the period August 1–18, 2007. The margin of error was plus or minus 2 percentage points.

27. John C. Green, *The American Religious Landscape and Political Attitudes: A Baseline for 2004* (Akron, OH: University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, 2004), 43, 44. Survey cosponsored by the Pew Research Center, Washington, DC.

28. The 2007 Pew Research Center survey cited 57 percent of white evangelical Protestant respondents, who said it was more important to preserve the potential lives of human embryos than to use those embryos to find medical cures. Only 28 percent of mainline Protestants and 32 percent of Catholics, however, said it was more important to save the embryos. "Religion in Campaign '08," 14.

29. Green, *American Religious Landscape*, 42 (Table 21).

30. *Ibid.*, 47 (Table 24).

31. Pew Research Center, *More Americans Question*.

32. Green, *American Religious Landscape*, 9 (Table 3).

33. *Ibid.*, 8–9 (Tables 1–3 for Republican-Democratic ratios in 1992 and 2004, and traditionalist Christians in GOP in 2004).

34. Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Religion in America: Non-Dogmatic, Diverse and Politically Relevant," Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, June 23, 2008, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/876/religion-america-part-two>. The Pew Center surveyed more than 35,000 Americans for this research.

35. Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, "Religion a Strength and Weakness for Both Parties: Public Divided on Origins of Life," Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, August 30, 2005, 1, 3–4, <http://people-press.org/report/254/religion-a-strength-and-weakness-for-both-parties>. Both parties were criticized "for being too beholden to ideological constituencies." Respondents were split evenly between those who thought secular or nonreligious liberals had too much control over the Democratic Party (44 percent), and religious conservatives had too much control over the Republican Party (45 percent). The survey, conducted July 7–17, 2005, was based on telephone interviews with a nationwide, randomly selected sample of 2,000 adults (with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points).

36. Hart, "Conservatism, the Protestant Right"; and Jerome L. Himmelstein, *To The Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 80–94.