

Conservative Christians and Political Participation

A Reference Handbook

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A B C  C L I O

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Introduction

The participation of conservative Christians in U.S. politics has a long heritage. Christians and Christian organizations have engaged in political activity since the colonial era. The first Great Awakening, the religious revival beginning in the 1730s, had more than religious significance: It ultimately led to challenges to the royal church and to the government officials who supported it, and it contributed to the rise of the antislavery movement. Christian groups engaged in various reform movements during that era, including campaigns to preserve the Sabbath as a day of rest and to bring assistance to Native Americans. In the nineteenth century, many Christians became involved in the campaign against the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, an effort that ultimately resulted in passage of the short-lived Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, establishing national prohibition.

In the late nineteenth century, with greater numbers of clergy adhering to more progressive understandings of their faith, a split occurred among Christian denominations. On one side were conservatives, often called fundamentalists, who held to traditional, or fundamental, beliefs of Christianity, including biblical inerrancy, the deity and virgin birth of Jesus, the substitutionary atonement (Jesus's death on the cross reconciled human beings with God), and the bodily resurrection of Jesus. These denominations primarily emphasized personal salvation. On the other side of the split were those, called progressives or liberals, who focused their energies on the improvement of society, believing that God had provided for the constant betterment of human beings through human efforts to reform social institutions and minister to the physical needs of the population. Liberals often doubted fundamentalist beliefs, such as the virgin birth and biblical inerrancy.

In the first chapter of this book, we present a brief history of Christians' involvement in the American political process from the early days of the nation to the present. Using General Social Survey

data as well as other data sources, we describe who the conservative Christians are today, providing membership totals both for denominations considered mainline (predominantly progressive or liberal) Protestant and for those generally considered fundamentalist or conservative. We discuss three trends—increasing membership in fundamentalist denominations, a decrease in mainline church adherents, and a growing group that refuses to identify with any religion—that suggest an increasing polarity concerning religion in the United States.

In Chapter 2, we examine the participation of conservative Christian individuals and organizations in political protest, a strategy that, in the past forty years, various movements have used as a method of political involvement. Protest often encompasses a delicate balance between confrontation and cooperation with established authorities. We present case studies of antiabortion demonstrations and of protests against a U.S. Supreme Court decision disallowing organized prayer at the start of public high school athletic events. Each case highlights the costs of protesting, as well as the potential gains to be made, for conservative Christians.

Chapter 3 focuses on the activities of conservative Christian social movements and interest groups. We emphasize the need to counter the activities of an opposition group as a major incentive to organize: Conservative Christians generally become politically active to respond to perceived threats from groups that promote objectives that conservative Christians find objectionable. We also note the difficulties that groups in general face when attempting to organize for political activity. Focusing on conservative Christian organizations, we describe the activities of two prominent groups: the Moral Majority, established by Jerry Falwell, Paul Weyrich, and other conservative Christian leaders in 1979, and the Christian Coalition, created by Pat Robertson in 1989 (the same year the Moral Majority came to an end). Each group experienced successes as well as failures, and their histories provide insights into the advantages as well as the limitations that conservative Christian groups face when attempting to achieve their objectives in an essentially secular society. We present several case studies of the activities of conservative Christian organizations, focusing on issues of concern to these groups, such as the display of the Ten Commandments, gay marriage, obscenity and pornography, partial-birth abortion, and the wording of the Pledge of Allegiance.

In Chapter 4, we discuss a turnaround in voter turnout on the part of conservative Christians. Since the 1980s, the religious right has

gone from a near political apathy to participation on par with that of the general public. In addition, conservative Christian voters have swung from a preponderance of support for the Democratic party to a routine support (among white conservative Christians) for the Republican party. Yet that partisanship is not carved in stone, and many in the religious right appear to vote for an individual candidate as much as voting for a political party. Our analysis of General Social Survey data and National Election Studies data reveals the voting patterns of conservative Christians in contrast to members of mainline churches. We also discuss African-American conservative Christians, who tend to express attitudes and partisan preferences that are very different from those of whites, indicating that conservative religious beliefs and conservative political views do not always coincide.

Chapter 5 investigates the participation of conservative Christians in government at the local, state, and national levels. Conservative Christian organizations have campaigned to have like-minded individuals elected to state legislatures, city councils, and local and state boards of education. In the year 2000, the Republican party, the favored party of conservative Christian organizations, controlled the presidency and both houses of Congress. Also as the twenty-first century began, the U.S. Supreme Court was one or two appointments away from establishing a decisive conservative majority that likely would be more favorable toward the conservative Christian position on such issues as abortion, same-sex marriage, and separation of church and state. On the other hand, openly conservative Christian candidates have had little direct electoral success, and some fundamentalists remain disappointed in the lack of substantive legislation favoring their position on abortion, tuition tax credits, and oral prayer in public school. There are a variety of factors that work against the political success of the religious right, and those factors may help explain why most of their recent political efforts have focused on state and local offices and issues.

The story of conservative Christians and political participation is a continuing one. Although scholars have predicted the downfall of the religious right at various times over the past thirty-five years, conservative Christian groups have continued to influence various aspects of the American political landscape. In this book, we emphasize two factors in that continuing participation: First, seeing themselves as separate from, but essentially embedded in, a secular society, conservative Christians view political activity as a way of altering the secular culture in ways more amicable to their

conception of a good society. Second, conservative Christians perceive a necessity in entering the political arena to do battle with organizations that advocate objectives contrary to the basic values of conservative Christians—interests such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Organization for Women, and the National Abortion Rights Action League. The future political success of conservative Christians will depend on the preferences of citizens in general, the political skills of interest groups and their leaders, and the ability of leaders to create alliances with nonreligious organizations, particularly political parties.

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Overview

The extensive participation of conservative Christian groups in the American political process since the early 1980s does not at all represent a new phenomenon. Throughout the history of the United States, religious groups have become politically active, attempting to influence the opinions of the general population and to affect government decisions on issues of concern to the leadership and members of these groups. The participation of religious groups corresponds to the activities of various other interest groups in a representative democracy. This participation involves a plurality of interests, sometimes cooperating, sometimes competing with each other, all vying for the satisfaction of their special concerns. Opposition from nonreligious groups to the political participation of conservative Christian groups and religious organizations in general also has a long history. Many persons and groups throughout the nation's history have raised questions about the appropriateness of organized religions' involvement in American politics, asking whether such participation is conducive to the republican principles upon which the nation was originally based.

Because the political participation of religious groups has a long history in the United States, we will first offer a brief account of such participation, identifying the groups involved and the issues that led to their mobilization to political action. Then we will delimit the present population of conservative Christians and conservative Christian organizations in the United States and identify various subgroupings based on religious belief and practice as well as political stances. We will com-

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pare and contrast the beliefs and goals of conservative Christian denominations and organizations with those of mainline churches. Because American politics so often involves interaction among differing interests, we will comment on the types of alliances that have developed in more recent years between conservative Christian organizations and other groups that may share common goals with them.

Who Are the Christian Conservatives?

Christian conservatives in the modern United States are individuals and Protestant churches that are religiously fundamental and politically conservative. Creedal fundamentalism is distinguished by belief in the inerrancy of the Bible as the inspired word of God, the personal salvation of the individual through Christ (often called a born-again experience), an evangelical or revivalist desire to save and convert others, and an acceptance of most traditional Christian doctrines such as belief in God as the Trinity and the virgin birth of Christ (See Smith 1987 for a discussion of the methods and difficulties in classifying denominations as fundamentalist). Political conservatism is marked by a general belief in the importance of limiting the size and scope of government, yet there is a specific willingness among conservative Christians to use government to restore what is seen as traditional social values. From the conservative or neoconservative perspective, government should be used to limit or ban abortions and to restrict or ban homosexual activities (including a prohibition on same-sex marriages, possibly by ratification of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution). Similarly, this view holds that government should be used to restore oral prayers in the public schools. Conservative Christians may vary in the intensity with which they subscribe to some or all of these creedal and political beliefs, but as we indicate below, these beliefs can be used to distinguish Christian conservatives from other Christians as well as non-Christians in the United States. History can provide us with some insights into how those beliefs came to be.

Religion and Politics in the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods

During the colonial era in the United States, religion and politics were intimately intertwined. In the seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay Colony, only those residents who were members of

the Congregational Church could claim the right as citizens to participate in the political life of the community (Reichley 2002 56). However, religious pluralism began very early in the colonies. Disagreements that arose over theological principles led to factions developing within the religious community. Roger Williams arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630 and soon came into serious conflict with Governor John Winthrop over religious and political matters. In 1636, Williams led a group of followers away from Massachusetts and settled Providence as a refuge from religious persecution. This land, purchased from the Narragansett Indians, became the new colony of Rhode Island. In 1682, William Penn, a Quaker, wished to establish a society that would serve as an approximation of the heavenly kingdom. Penn founded a colony that ultimately became Pennsylvania. Penn's more tolerant view of religious faith led to the nurturing of a variety of religious organizations in Pennsylvania. Maryland became a haven for Roman Catholics, especially after the British Parliament passed the Act of Toleration in 1649, guaranteeing that any person professing belief in Jesus Christ remain unmolested in the free exercise of religious belief (Reichley 2002, 82).

A religious revival called the Great Awakening, initiated by Calvinist minister Jonathan Edwards in Massachusetts, swept across the eastern seaboard in the 1730s and 1740s. The Great Awakening refocused American religious attention on the next world instead of this one. Edwards's vivid depictions of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" re-emphasized the natural depravity of human beings, the inadequacy of good works performed by the individual, and hence the need for individual spiritual rebirth (Christian 1966, 15). The evangelical fervor of the Great Awakening emphasized individual salvation for the next world rather than social improvement and political involvement in this one. Although those less fervent about religious belief tended to dominate in the cities, evangelicals gained ascendancy in the frontier regions of North America. As the Revolution approached, many ministers played a key role in supporting the cause of independence. The majority of Anglican clergy, however, remained loyal to Great Britain. Some recent scholars argue that religion played a central and largely unappreciated role in the nationalistic vision that shaped the early history of the United States. In his study of religion and politics, for example, Kevin Phillips (1999, xii–xiii) declared that "the importance of religion and war in the shaping of nations should not even be debatable. . . . From the birth of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, no Western nation has matched the English-speaking peoples in asserting their destiny as

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God's Kingdom." According to Phillips, the eighteenth century colonists uniformly foresaw that "*their* New Israel would stretch to the Mississippi or even the Pacific."

Several leaders of the contemporary Christian right claim that the key founders of the United States during the Revolution and the subsequent writing of the Constitution intended to establish a Christian nation. That claim has validity at least to the extent that Christianity was definitely the prevailing religion in the colonies and the newly established nation. However, the religious views of various notable personages of the time indicate that there likely was not a consensus on whether the framers of the U.S. Constitution intended to establish a Christian society (Mapp 2003). John G. West (1996) presents brief sketches of the religious views of several prominent Americans at the time of the nation's founding. Some (such as John Witherspoon and John Jay) were evangelicals, holding to traditional Christian beliefs. Others (e.g., Thomas Jefferson and John Adams) are most accurately described as deists, believing that God may have created the universe but that after the creation he stepped back to allow the finely structured mechanism to operate without further interference. For deists, formal religious practices were unneeded and claims of supernatural revelation were fallacious.

By the end of the eighteenth century, deism had become a prominent religious attitude among many intellectuals and upper-class Americans. Frank Manuel (2002) considers all of the first three American presidents to have been deists, and it is clear that Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were deists. In an 1803 letter to Benjamin Rush, for example, Jefferson wrote about his views of the Christian religion: "To the corruption of Christianity I am indeed opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian, in the only sense in which he wished anyone to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself all *human* excellence; and believing he never claimed any other" (Muelder, Sears, and Schlabach 1960, 76). In a letter to Thomas Jefferson in 1816, John Adams, limiting his profession of religious belief to acting well, commented, "The ten commandments and the sermon on the mount contain my religion" (Manuel 2002, 569).

Another noted American often associated with deism is Benjamin Franklin. When questioned seriously about his religion, Franklin replied in 1790 with an answer that provided what scholars have called an almost literal reproduction of the main principles of English deism: "Here is my creed. I believe in one God, the creator of the universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to

be worshiped. That the most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of man is immortal, and will be treated with justice in another life respecting his conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental points in all sound religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever sect I meet with them" (Muelder, Sears, and Schlabach 1960, 70–71).

Deists saw the core of the various religions to be essentially the same, but for some, God's providence was the perfect operation of his physical laws, and others saw God as taking a more active agency in human affairs. In this sense, George Washington was not a classic deist, for he held closely to the belief that divine providence meant that God did indeed intervene in human affairs. While serving as a general during the Revolution, Washington encouraged soldiers to attend worship services and discouraged profanity among the troops, and as president, he issued two national thanksgiving proclamations.

Whatever specific religious beliefs the nation's founders might have held, they generally agreed that morality was crucial to the success of republican politics and that organized religion was necessary, or at least helpful, in the development of an appropriate morality for the nation. As for deists, because they believed that the core of all sound religions was the same, they emphasized religious tolerance. Many prominent Americans of the time cautiously accepted the idea that reason and revelation could provide mutual support in developing and maintaining the human virtues required for republican government (West 1996, 76).

By the time the Revolution began, all but four of the colonies had some provision for an established church. Ministers who supported American independence tended to interpret the conflict as a struggle similar to the one between Israel and Egypt, with the colonies having been chosen by God as the "New Israel" (Gamble 2003, 10–11). Although the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibited the establishment of a state religion, the U.S. Supreme Court initially interpreted the Bill of Rights as applying only to the national government and not to the states. Consequently, more than forty years elapsed after the ratification of the First Amendment in 1791 before all of the states had ceased having an established religion. In the decades following the Revolution, the states one by one set aside such religious establishment provisions in their constitutions, until, in 1833, Massachusetts became the last state to end official support of religion. However, even after the elimination of any officially established religions, the states continued to maintain a series of statutes prohibiting blasphemy and Sabbath-breaking, to call for days

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of prayer, and to require a profession of religious belief from those who desired to hold public office (West 1996, 127). Even the present-day Texas constitution, originally adopted in 1876, contains a provision within its Bill of Rights that prohibits religious tests for any office holder, “provided he acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being.”

Although essentially a deist, John Adams kept his religious views very private and publicly expressed the precepts of orthodox Christianity. When president, Adams issued declarations for fast days as religious observances. Thomas Jefferson’s more widely known doubts about traditional Christian doctrine, and his willingness to criticize such tenets of Christian belief as the Trinity and the validity of the miracles recorded in the Bible, resulted in the more conservative clergy’s actively opposing his election as president in 1796 and 1800. Such opposition notwithstanding, Jefferson won the presidential election of 1800. He personally supported the development of Unitarianism as the religious position most appropriate to the United States.

However, other citizens preferred a more traditional religion, and another major religious revival, called the Second Great Awakening, occurred in the early nineteenth century and contributed to the prevalence of orthodox Christian beliefs. A significant outcome was that the Methodists and Baptists, benefiting from the evangelical appeal of the revival, became the largest Protestant denominations in the country. This revival also contributed to the creation of the Disciples of Christ out of Presbyterianism as another major evangelical denomination. Sunday schools became a major source of education in the early nineteenth century, mixing basic education with religious instruction. Between 1828 and 1835, the number of children attending Sunday school increased from approximately 127,000 to 1 million (West 1996, 102).

Christians and Politics in the Nineteenth Century

In addition to the more personally oriented religious revival in the early nineteenth century, evangelical leaders such as Lyman Beecher initiated campaigns for social reform. Beecher expected the United States to lead the world in moral and political liberation. He hoped that the country would be an example for all others, replacing violence with intelligence and virtue (Gamble 2003, 19). For instance, Alexander Hamilton’s death in a duel at the hands of Aaron Burr in

1804 precipitated a crusade against dueling, and Christian luminaries took the lead in this movement. Beecher preached a well-publicized sermon against dueling, and Yale president and prominent evangelical Christian Timothy Dwight also spoke out against the practice. Religious organizations passed resolutions condemning dueling, and clergymen preached sermons against the practice. Although instances of dueling continued, public opinion began to shift against the increasingly archaic means of resolving personal conflicts. In 1839, after two congressmen participated in a duel in which one of them was killed, Congress finally enacted legislation making dueling illegal in the District of Columbia.

A major evangelical Christian concern during the 1830s was the preservation of the Christian Sabbath as a day of rest. In 1810, Congress had enacted legislation that required post offices to remain open all seven days of the week. In 1828, evangelicals established the General Union for Promoting the Observance of the Christian Sabbath to oppose this policy. One point of contention was that the federal government, by requiring the mails to run on Sunday, had overruled state and local ordinances against breaking the Sabbath. In addition, those opposed to the Sunday mails argued that the federal government was violating the right of conscience by requiring employees to choose between keeping their jobs with the post office by working on Sundays and thus violating their conscience or observing the Sabbath according to their own religious beliefs, thereby risking the loss of their jobs. Therefore, the group argued, the First Amendment protection of free religious practice required the federal government to cease Sunday mail delivery. Supporting the compelling state interest standard, evangelicals argued that the government should refrain from limiting the free exercise of religion in the absence of an overriding reason to do otherwise. Those supporting the Sunday mails publicly accused their opponents of attempting to impair republican government and of restricting religious liberty by imposing a particular day of the week on all citizens as an official day of rest (West 1996, 157). Although the attempt to stop the Sunday mails failed, by the 1840s, many Sunday mail routes had been terminated anyway due to improved systems of communication and transportation.

A second issue of the time inspiring evangelical political involvement was the conflict over Native American lands in Georgia. For many years, the state of Georgia had been attempting to gain additional land concessions from the Cherokee tribe. President Andrew Jackson, sympathizing with Georgia's desire to gain control of more

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land, decided to leave the fate of the Cherokees completely up to the state. The immediate intervention of evangelicals occurred when Georgia, concerned about whites fomenting discontent among the Native American tribe over the land issue, passed a law that prohibited white people from living with the Cherokees unless the whites declared their loyalty to the state and obtained a license. Attempts by religious groups to defend the Indians' claims to the land failed, even though the Supreme Court upheld the rights of the missionaries and the Cherokees (West 1996, 202). In 1838, more than 12,000 Cherokees were placed in detention camps in preparation for removal and were ultimately transported to Oklahoma. Many of them suffered and died as a result of the removal, and a tribal civil war occurred after they arrived in Oklahoma. Although the support of religious groups failed to protect the Cherokee tribe from suffering the consequences of removal, without the intervention of evangelicals, the tribe would have had no supporters of any consequence.

The Revolutionary period would not be the last time that American clergy took opposing sides in a major conflict. The efforts of religious groups that opposed the Sunday mails and Cherokee removal were initial experiments in religious group involvement in the political process and were a prelude to the struggle over slavery, which would activate many Christians and Christian organizations prior to the Civil War. According to Kevin Phillips (1999), while the first Great Awakening of American religious fervor contributed to the American Revolution in 1775, the Second Great Awakening, beginning in 1799, played a significant role in the subsequent political mobilizations that undergirded the Civil War. In the northeastern United States of the 1830s, fervor over the perfectibility of humankind gave rise to a dozen "isms," from utopianism to abolitionism. This religious revival has been described as second commandment Christianity, as it was concerned with loving or improving one's neighbor through strict keeping of the Sabbath, temperance, and the abolition of slavery (Phillips 1999, 357–359).

In the South, the story was more complicated and varied by social class. In the churches of the lower-class whites, many of whom were Baptists, the Second Great Awakening centered on personal sin and salvation. Unlike the more community-focused, reformist revivals in the northeast, the revivals of the lower-class whites in the South concentrated on changing the individual rather than reforming society. Southern elites in the Episcopalian church, on the other hand, were less interested in change and more concerned with a biblical defense

of slavery and in preserving the social and economic status quo (Phillips 1999, 373–375).

Religion provided the context for the different views of politics in these Southern personal revivals and Northern reformist revivals, but politics was also a major force in fashioning U.S. religious denominations. Disagreements over slavery eventually split the three major Protestant denominations into northern and southern groups. The Southern Methodists broke away from the Methodists in 1844, the Southern Baptists from the Baptists in 1845, and the “Old School” Presbyterians divided from the northern “New School” ones in stages from 1837 to 1861 (Phillips 1999, 282–284).

In 1818, the Presbyterian General Assembly declared that slavery was “a gross violation of the most precious and sacred right of human nature” and contrary to the laws of God (Reichley 2002, 180). On the other hand, in 1822, the South Carolina Baptists Association, supporting the institution of slavery, presented the traditional argument that the existence of slavery represented punishment for original sin (Reichley 2002, 181). In 1844, when the Methodist General Conference declared that Bishop James Andrews, because he was a slaveholder, should cease to perform his church functions, fourteen Methodist regional conferences in the South left the General Conference to establish the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In the 1850s, Henry Ward Beecher (son of Lyman Beecher and brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of the anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*) was the Congregationalist pastor of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York. Beecher solicited donations from his parishioners to purchase Sharps rifles, which were sent to antislavery groups in Kansas to aid in their defense against proslavery forces. In his sermons, Beecher linked the Union cause to the struggle for liberty everywhere, optimistically foreseeing a grand future for all nations unified in a common mission (Gamble 2003, 19). During the Civil War, religious leaders on both sides proclaimed that God favored their cause. Following the Civil War, northern Protestants tended to identify with the Republicans. Various reasons have been suggested for this general preference for the Republican party, including that party’s close ties to the Union side in the Civil War, northern Protestants’ preference for Republican economic policies, and an image of the Republican party as the party of morality (Reichley 2002, 190). Despite the general loyalty of Protestants to the Republicans, Democrat William Jennings Bryan, in his first bid for the presidency in 1896, tried to appeal to evangelical Christian sentiments in his campaign. In delivering his famous “Cross of Gold” speech at

the Democratic national convention, Bryan intended, at least in part, to attract religious support: “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold” (Morison 1965, 798). This appeal notwithstanding, Protestant clergy and lay people generally supported Republican William McKinley as the candidate of the party of order and moral principle.

The Rise of a “Two-Party System” in American Protestantism

In the late nineteenth century, there continued to develop a significant division in Protestantism: The more liberal, humanist groups were associated with the social gospel movement, which focused on serving the earthly needs of human beings, and the more conservative denominations were chiefly concerned with personal salvation. This division would widen still further in the twentieth century. The liberal segment of Protestantism had its origins in the deism of early Americans such as Thomas Jefferson and gained additional support from the Unitarian movement in New England. This humanist element in Christianity avidly supported abolition before the Civil War and advocated southern reconstruction following the armed conflict. Protestant ministers such as Josiah Strong and Walter Rauschenbusch advocated the social gospel perspective.

Church historian Martin Marty (1970) has noted that a “two-party system” developed in American Protestantism between the mainline churches and the more fundamentalist evangelical denominations. The idea of a two-party system usually involved a conservative majority in the mainline churches composed primarily of lay people, and a liberal minority, including a central core of the clergy (Reichley 2002, 198). Contributing to the two-party split within American Protestantism was the increasing influence in the late nineteenth century of a German trend of “higher criticism” of the Bible, a criticism that rejected scripture as the infallible word of God and instead regarded the Bible as subject to the same analysis as any other literary work. By 1910, this more liberal religious outlook had influenced most of the major Protestant seminaries, and by the late 1920s, most fundamentalist Christians—those adhering to the central beliefs of historic Christianity, such as the infallible authority of the Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus, and Jesus’ central importance in a person’s achieving personal salvation—had left the major Christian denomi-

nations, and those denominations had become part of mainline Protestantism. The mainline churches were governed primarily by a clergy committed to a more modern, liberal theology that put into question the tenets of the more orthodox theology of traditional Christianity (Guth et al. 1997, 10).

The orthodox evangelical denominations espoused a more individualist theology, believing that the major problems society faced had their origin in the sinful condition in which individual human beings were snared and that if any improvement were to occur, it must originate in the salvation of individual persons. On the other hand, the “modernist” mainline churches, particularly the leadership and clergy of these churches, focused on social explanations for the various evils found in society and on possible strategies for bringing about the betterment of the human condition in this earthly life. According to this more progressive party within Christianity, people needed sufficient nourishment, shelter, protection, and gainful employment to live honest, peaceful, and productive lives, and Christians must bear the responsibility of creating the institutions capable of delivering these basic human needs.

The division between the liberal, or progressive, and the more conservative, or fundamentalist, factions within Christian denominations was highlighted by their respective responses to World War I. Progressives had expected that, entering the twentieth century, Christian influence on the world would lead to a new era of peace within and among nations. As the European conflict loomed, the more progressive clergy suggested that Christians had to share some of the blame for the war because they focused too heavily on an individualistic gospel and on otherworldly salvation, disdaining their obligations to promote equality and brotherhood in this world (Gamble 2003, 93). Possible Christian blameworthiness for the war notwithstanding, many progressive Christian leaders began to see the war as a valuable opportunity to remake the world. The war became, for many, an opportunity to establish democracy and ultimately to end war for all time.

J. Gresham Machen, the conservative Presbyterian theologian, expressed his objections to the progressive interpretation of the war as a conflict between the absolutes of good and evil. He rejected as foolish the notion that the war was being fought for democracy. Even following the disillusionment that set in at the end of the war, many progressives remained hopeful about the future possibilities for achieving justice in the world. In the 1920s, Machen expressed the view that, despite material advancement, the world had in fact con-

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tinued to decline (Gamble 2003, 234). The disagreement between liberal and conservative Christians revolved in part around contrasting understandings of what could effect genuine improvement in the human condition. Liberals continued to believe that institutional reforms could eliminate evil, a view that conservatives found naïve.

Some charged that Christians had confused patriotism with religion (Gamble 2003, 237) by regarding the United States as a savior nation for the rest of the world. The liberal Federal Council of Churches, precursor to the National Council of Churches, continued to call for reforms to institute economic and racial justice as well as international disarmament, and it lobbied Congress to allow the United States to participate in the International Court of Justice and to cooperate more closely with the League of Nations (Gamble 2003, 241). More liberal Christians continued to believe in progress and the United States as the source of redemption for the world.

Following World War I, temperance reemerged as a major theme for evangelical Christians. Temperance had become a topic of concern for reform-minded evangelicals in the nineteenth century, and Christian groups had initiated campaigns against the use of alcohol. The American Temperance Society was established in 1826, and by 1828, more than 400 temperance organizations had been created around the nation. In 1846, the first state law instituting prohibition of alcohol had been passed in Maine, and thirteen other states quickly followed with their own statutes. However, by 1865, only two states continued a prohibition policy. In 1869, Frances Willare, president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, initiated the formation of the Prohibition party, which combined an antialcohol campaign with such other social crusades as women's rights and the call for a more egalitarian economic structure (Reichley 2002, 205).

In 1893, the Anti-Saloon League was formed, which, in order to avoid conflict with more conservative Christians, eschewed issues associated with the social reform movement and focused its efforts completely on prohibition. Finally, in 1919, the states ratified the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which stated that "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited." Ironically, this intervention of religious interests into the political process to regulate the morality of the population in fact led to an era in which a large portion of the American people sidestepped the law of the land to procure alcoholic beverages. A group of entrepreneurs—bootleggers and

gangsters—eagerly broke the law in order to provide Americans with a product they themselves had decided to prohibit. This experiment in legalized morality came to an end in 1933 with the ratification of the Twenty-First Amendment, repealing Prohibition. This amendment has been the only one ratified through the alternative constitutional procedure involving state conventions rather than state legislatures, because supporters of repeal in Congress feared that religious groups still wielded very strong influence in state legislatures and therefore would likely have defeated the amendment.

In addition to Prohibition, more conservative Christians faced another battle in the first decades of the twentieth century that was more consonant with fundamentalist Christian opposition to modernism. Ever since Charles Darwin published *Origin of Species* (1856), detailing a theory of evolution through natural selection that portrayed human beings as the result of development from lower forms of life, conservative Christians had mounted a counteroffensive against what they considered a serious threat to the moral and religious foundations of society. In 1925, John T. Scopes, a high school teacher, intentionally violated a Tennessee law prohibiting teaching the theory of evolution in the public schools. When Scopes was put on trial, William Jennings Bryan, a three-time Democratic presidential candidate and the secretary of state during President Woodrow Wilson's first term, agreed to serve as one of the prosecutors in Scopes's trial. Politically, Bryan supported liberal causes such as woman suffrage, a national minimum wage, and a graduated income tax. However, on the issue of evolution, he held a typically fundamentalist Christian position.

The World's Christian Fundamentals Association had asked Bryan to prosecute the case; this was a conservative organization established in 1919 to espouse the traditional beliefs of the Christian faith, including belief in the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the ultimate bodily resurrection of the just and the unjust. However, other noted fundamentalists failed to provide Bryan with support, leaving him to face by himself the highly skilled defense attorney in the case, Clarence Darrow. Bryan agreed to be cross-examined by Darrow, and Bryan's testimony betrayed his ignorance of the theory of evolution. Although the jury found Scopes guilty, Bryan's public humiliation at the hands of Darrow made the victory seem hollow. Bryan died in his sleep within a week of the trial's end.

Students of Christian conservatism (for example, Reichley 2002, 207) observe that evangelicals largely withdrew from the national po-

litical realm following the Scopes trial. However, others (for example, Silverman 2003, 174) suggest that for many years after the trial, public school textbooks approached the topic of evolution very cautiously, indicating a more extensive victory for the conservative Christians than simply the conviction of John T. Scopes for violating a Tennessee law. Conservative Christian denominations and groups still remained an influential force specifically at the state and local levels, where they could pressure more effectively school boards and other governments that had a more direct influence on their everyday lives.

Although analysts (for example, Reichley 2002, 207) point to the notable failures in the crusades against teaching evolution and in support of prohibition as significant reasons for lack of conservative Christian participation in national politics, other, more basic factors led to the withdrawal of many orthodox Christians from the political realm. Premillennialism, the belief that conditions in the world would steadily worsen until Christ returned to fight a major battle with the forces of evil before establishing a thousand-year reign on Earth, was a dominant belief among many evangelicals. Therefore, any concern on their part for secular matters paled in comparison to the conviction that worsening world conditions held the promise of the consummation of biblical prophecy (Guth et al. 1997, 44). Evangelical clergy thus held a more “otherworldly” perspective, which turned them and their congregations away from the social and political concerns of everyday life. On the other hand, mainline Christian clergy sought such engagement. The individualist social theology of evangelicals also contributed to political quiescence, for they perceived the ultimate cause of human problems to lie not in the external political structure but in the individual human heart. Evangelicals concentrated their efforts primarily on saving souls, not fighting political battles. However, direct challenges to the moral beliefs of evangelicals ultimately contributed to their political activism at the national level.

The Twentieth-Century Rise of Christian Political Activism

In the first half of the twentieth century, various Christian denominations, including Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Lutherans, established offices in Washington, D.C., which demonstrated a willingness to delve into certain areas of politics. In 1950, a group of

mainline denominations formed the National Council of Churches (NCC), which was a successor to the old Federal Council of Churches originally established in 1908. In 1941, Carl McIntyre, who claimed that the Federal Council of Churches was too liberal and thus misrepresented the true Christian beliefs of Americans, established the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC). Members of the ACCC could not also be members of the NCC. After World War II, the ACCC focused on a strong antisocialist and anticommunist agenda, and the NCC followed a more liberal program of social and economic reform.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, mainline churches were united in the crusade to end racial segregation. The struggle for integration represented just the sort of moral engagement with the world to improve the state of society that more liberal clergy in mainline denominations found appealing, and it proved to be a relatively successful enterprise, producing a high level of unity among denominations. By the late 1960s, the Vietnam War had become another major issue, gaining the attention of mainline clergy such as William Sloan Coffin, Presbyterian minister and chaplain at Yale University. These ministers voiced their strong opposition to U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia. However, the moral clarity and unity of the civil rights movement could not be reproduced in this new campaign. A significant phenomenon occurred: Although Protestant clergy strongly supported protests against the war, a majority of the Protestant laity voiced opposition to such protests. This gap represented an existing, more general, division within mainline churches between the clergy and laity. Meanwhile, mainline seminaries were graduating a new generation of ministers who had distinctly liberal theological and political views.

The gap between the more conservative views of the membership of mainline churches and the more liberal views of their clergy tended to widen throughout the 1970s. According to Reichley (2002, 262), adding to this gap was a change in the organizational structure of mainline churches: Bureaucratic organization became more important to the operation of church bodies, granting to the clergy greater control over the structure and operation of church organizations. Roberto Michels's (1959) "iron law of oligarchy" came into play: Organizations tend ultimately to be governed by a few people in top decision-making positions. Although church organizations were in structure democracies, they in fact encouraged control by the professional clergy. Resolutions that the leadership introduced at church conventions usually passed with minimal opposition from

lay representatives. For instance, the 1981 General Assembly of the Disciples of Christ, at the urging of the clergy, issued a "Peace with Justice" statement supporting disarmament, environmental protection, improved educational opportunities, expanded social welfare programs, and opposition to the Reagan administration's defense policies (Guth et al. 1997, 41).

Guth et al. (1997, 151) note that in the 1960s, while major public attention focused on the activities of more liberal clergy, conservative ministers across the nation became involved in local activities such as supporting the regulation of alcoholic beverages, opposing referenda to legalize gambling, and leading campaigns to place limitations on pornography. A series of political events ultimately led to the rebirth of conservative Christian political activism at the national level in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Among these events were two Supreme Court decisions: the 1962 ruling in *Engel v. Vitale* prohibiting government-sponsored prayer in the public schools and the 1973 decision (*Roe v. Wade*) legalizing abortion. In these types of events, conservative Christians perceived a growing public immorality that was actually being supported by government policy.

The restoration of traditional moral values became the battle cry for conservative Christians as a new group of conservative leaders entered the public arena. Paul Weyrich became the director of the National Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, which was essentially a training center for conservative political candidates. Donald Wildmon organized the National Federation for Decency in 1976 (renamed the American Family Association in 1987); Robert Billings founded the National Christian Action Coalition in 1978; and Edward McAteer established the Religious Roundtable in 1979. Christian Voice, an organization established in 1978, grew out of the anti-gay rights movement in California and gained notoriety for producing "moral report cards" containing information about the voting records of members of Congress on issues of importance to the organization. Christian Voice distributed the "report cards" to churches at election time. In 1979, Billings helped persuade fundamentalist preacher Jerry Falwell to become the leader of the Moral Majority, the most prominent conservative Christian organization in the 1980s. Early in his career as a preacher, Falwell had declined to take part in politics, but as he became convinced that the United States was in moral decline, he agreed to become politically active as a leader of conservative Christians.

Although conservative Christian leaders established organizations for the express purpose of becoming more actively involved in poli-

tics, the more prominent leaders themselves did not gain widespread acceptance among the U.S. population. Throughout American history, although their theological credentials have given religious leaders greater visibility in the political realm, once they take an active part in politics, these leaders become as exposed to strong criticism as any other person involved in the political realm. The American people have shown great respect for religious leaders, but at times they have rejected such leaders' more direct involvement in politics. When some religious leaders have attempted to gain high public office, the voters have often rejected them at the polls. In 1988, Pat Robertson, a charismatic evangelical preacher and host of the *700 Club* television program, entered the campaign for the Republican presidential nomination. In the Iowa caucuses, in which the outcome depended on the participation of well-motivated activists, Robertson finished a close second behind Senator Robert Dole. However, in the New Hampshire Republican primary a week later, Robertson received a disappointing 9 percent of the vote. Even in the subsequent southern state primaries, Robertson did not win the largest share of the votes of evangelicals, finishing behind Dole and George H. W. Bush (Reichley 2002, 330). Fellow evangelical leaders such as Jerry Falwell, perhaps uncomfortable with Robertson's Pentecostal affiliation, backed Bush for the nomination. Following his disappointing showing in the 1988 Republican presidential primaries, Robertson formed the Christian Coalition, which campaigned to elect candidates at the local, state, and national levels who expressed appropriate moral values. Jerry Falwell also experienced opposition in the general public. In 1989, Falwell, who was receiving highly negative evaluations in public opinion polls, decided to terminate the Moral Majority, which had been renamed Liberty Federation in 1987 in what proved an unsuccessful attempt to attract nonfundamentalist supporters.

In 2000, Gary Bauer, director of the Family Research Council, entered the race for the Republican presidential nomination as the heir apparent to the support that conservative Christians had previously given to Ronald Reagan. However, Bauer gained little support in the early primaries. Fellow evangelicals did not respond to Bauer's appeal for support, pledging their allegiance instead to George W. Bush. Bauer soon dropped out of the race, endorsing Senator John McCain of Arizona for the Republican nomination. In February, McCain reacted to a smear campaign against him during the South Carolina primary battle, criticizing conservative Christian leaders such as Falwell and Robertson and calling them "agents of intolerance."

Both Falwell and Robertson tended to alienate the general public. For instance, soon after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Falwell, while a guest on Robertson's *700 Club*, suggested that the attacks indicated God's judgment on immoral elements in American society. Robertson publicly agreed with Falwell's analysis. Following the strong negative response to this from the general public as well as from fellow Christian conservatives, Falwell apologized for his statements, and Robertson admitted that they should not have been made. Soon thereafter, Robertson stepped down as president of the Christian Coalition. Although Robertson predicted that the Coalition would regain its former stature, others suggested that the organization likely had lost its influence in American politics for the foreseeable future. Critics argued that Robertson, by failing to fulfill the organization's agenda (including supporting school prayer and campaigning for a ban on abortion) and by failing to support impeachment efforts against President Bill Clinton, contributed to the demise of the Coalition.

Other conservative Christian organizations proliferated during the 1980s and 1990s, often forming around a narrow group of issues.

Describing Christian Conservative Denominations Today

The denominational landscape in the United States is extraordinarily complex, but as the above historical account of the evolution of activism and beliefs indicates, one can identify Christian conservative and mainline Protestant denominations by the religious and political beliefs of their members. In categorizing denominations as fundamentalist or mainline for the purposes of this book, we have generally followed the research methodology developed by the General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is a recurring nationwide probability sample of U.S. households. Begun in 1972 and continued to the present, the GSS is an authoritative source of information on U.S. public opinion. Its surveys are conducted for the National Data Program for the Social Sciences at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of the University of Chicago, and the GSS data are distributed by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut (Davis and Smith 2003). Tom W. Smith (1987) describes a multifactor approach to categorization that includes not only the survey answers of denominational members but also prior scholarly

classifications, membership in ecumenical associations, and the stated theological beliefs of the denominations.

The mainline churches may have ministers and administrators whose views are generally more liberal than those of their congregations, but the surveyed religious views of the mainline congregations can also be distinguished from the more fundamentalist beliefs of the Christian conservative membership. Individual beliefs, of course, may vary from member to member, but the majority of Christian conservative members adhere to the inerrancy of the Bible, which is seen as a complete and verbally correct guide to life. On the other hand, although the majority of mainline church members regard the Bible as divinely inspired, they tend not to take it literally, word for word, as being factually true. Some mainline Christians may have relatively fundamentalist views, but many of them regard the Bible as metaphor and as a story of the search for meaning. Fundamentalists hold that the Bible is literally true, both as science and as history, whereas mainline members tend to accept secular change and science as important or at least as not being antireligious.

Using the GSS survey responses of denomination members guided us to categorize many current Protestant denominations as fundamentalist. We compared these categorizations with denominational data from the National Election Survey to confirm their reliability. We then investigated the membership and number of adherents of each denomination using the *Religious Congregations & Membership* data of the Glenmary Research Center for 1990 and 2000 (Jones et al. 2002). There appear to be many small congregations for which authoritative data are not available. Independent and nondenominational church members may be interviewed in GSS surveys, but these congregations often do not provide data about membership and number of adherents. Nonetheless, this multiple approach allowed us to produce a list of eight mainline denominations with almost 26 million adherents in 2000 and a list of thirty-six fundamentalist denominations with more than 37 million adherents. With that categorization in hand, we were able to investigate the demographic characteristics of denomination members as well as trends in the growth or decline in the number of adherents from 1990 to 2000.

In many ways, Christian conservatives today are much like their counterparts in the mainline Protestant denominations. The size of the cities in which they live, family income, and several other demographic characteristics do not differ greatly between members of mainline and fundamentalist denominations. But these denominations do

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TABLE 1.1 Region of Residence of Fundamentalist and Mainline Christians

	<i>Southern U.S.</i>	<i>Other U.S. Regions</i>
Fundamentalists (n=5,240)	58%	42%
Mainline (n=3,775)	38%	62%

Source: General Social Survey. 2002. *NORC-GSS Cumulative Data File 1972–2000*. Storrs, CT: The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

differ in some interesting ways. GSS data from in-home surveys by the National Opinion Research Center from 1972 through 2000 can be combined to produce the following demographic comparisons between interviewees who identified themselves as belonging to the mainline denominations and those who identified themselves as belonging to the fundamentalist denominations (Tables 1.1 and 1.2).

GSS survey data indicate that 58 percent of the members of fundamentalist denominations live in the south, versus 38 percent of mainline members. The Glenmary Research Center data for 2000 indicate that 65 percent of the adherents of all reported denominations were located outside of the south, whereas 35 percent were located in the south. For the purposes of both these surveys, the “south” category consisted of denominational reports from Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida (Jones et al. 2002). As the following summaries of GSS survey data indicate, although Christian conservatives are demographically similar to their mainline counterparts, they are a bit younger and somewhat less educated than those of the selected mainline denominations.

Trends in Denominational Size and Political Preferences

In an effort to achieve comparability across years and across denominations, the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies compiled data on denominational adherents. They define *adherents* as all full members, their children, and the estimated number of

TABLE 1.2 Demographics for Fundamentalist and Mainline Christians

<i>Size of City of Residence</i>	<i>>50,000</i>	<i>2,500 to 49,999</i>	<i><2,500</i>		
Fundamentalists (n=5,240)	65%	17%	18%		
Mainline (n=3,775)	71%	15%	15%		
<i>Income in 1986</i>	<i>Less than \$5,000</i>	<i>\$5,000 to \$25,000</i>	<i>\$25,000 to \$50,000</i>	<i>Greater than \$50,000</i>	
Fundamentalists (n=5,073)	33%	37%	23 %	8%	
Mainline (n=3,775)	29%	30%	26%	14%	
<i>Education, Highest Level</i>	<i>< High School</i>	<i>High School Diploma</i>	<i>Jr. College Degree</i>	<i>Bachelor's Degree</i>	<i>Graduate Degree</i>
Fundamentalists (n=5,226)	28%	55%	4%	9%	4%
Mainline (n=3,765)	15%	52%	6%	18%	9%
<i>Age</i>	<i>18–29</i>	<i>30–49</i>	<i>50–64</i>	<i>65+</i>	
Fundamentalists (n=5,250)	19%	40%	21%	20%	
Mainline (n=3,775)	15%	37%	23%	25%	

Source: General Social Survey. 2002. *NORC-GSS Cumulative Data File 1972–2000*. Storrs, CT: The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

other participants, such as “the baptized,” “those not confirmed,” and “those regularly attending services.” In Tables 1.3 and 1.4, we present data on the total number of reported adherents for mainline and evangelical denominations, respectively.

As Table 1.3 indicates, all eight of the mainline Protestant denominations reported declines in their numbers of adherents, and these drops occurred at the same time that the overall U.S. population grew by 13.2 percent, from almost 249 million to more than 281 million people.

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TABLE 1.3 Total Reported Adherents for Mainline Protestant Denominations, 1990 and 2000

<i>Mainline Denomination</i>	<i>Adherents in 2000</i>	<i>Adherents in 1990</i>	<i>Percent Change</i>
American Baptist Churches in the USA	1,767,462	1,873,731	-5.7
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	1,017,784	1,037,757	-1.9
Episcopal Church	2,314,756	2,445,286	-5.3
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	5,113,418	5,226,798	-2.2
Presbyterian Church (USA)	3,141,566	3,553,335	-11.6
United Church of Christ	1,698,918	1,993,459	-14.8
United Methodist Church	10,350,629	11,091,032	-6.7
Reformed Church in America	335,677	362,932	-7.5
Total	25,740,210	27,584,330	-6.7
U.S. Total Population	281,421,906	248,709,873	13.2

Sources: Bradley, Martin B., Norman M. Green, Jr., Dale E. Jones, Mac Lynn, and Lou McNeil. 1992. *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990*. Atlanta, GA: Glenmary Research Center; Jones, Dale E., Sherri Doty, James E. Horsch, Richard Houseal, Mac Lynn, John P. Marcum, Kenneth M. Sanchagrin, and Richard H. Taylor. 2002. *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000: An Enumeration by Region, State, and County Based on Data Reported by 149 Religious Bodies*. Nashville, TN: Glenmary Research Center.

The Roman Catholic Church in the United States (not shown in Table 1.3) was the only mainline Christian denomination that showed growth in the number of adherents, although it posted a decline in the number of churches. Data indicate that the Catholic church had 22,441 churches and 53,385,998 adherents for 1990 versus 21,791 churches and 62,035,042 adherents in 2000—a decline of 3 percent in the number of churches and an increase of 16 percent in the number of adherents. Reichley (2002, 263) notes that the increase in the number of Catholic adherents can be attributed primar-

ily to immigration from traditionally Catholic Latin American countries. But, aside from this Catholic immigration, the mainline Protestant denominations showed ten-year decreases in the number of adherents that ranged from -1.9 percent to -14.8 percent.

On the other hand, the number of adherents in evangelical Protestant denominations grew substantially from 1990 to 2000. Table 1.4 shows data for 36 fundamentalist denominations with reported adherents of 50,000 or more in the United States. During the 1990s, twenty-two of these denominations increased the number of adherents. Seven of them did not report data for 1990 and were new additions to the 2000 survey, and only six of the thirty-six evangelical denominations indicated declines in the number of adherents.

As in previous decades, evangelical denominations increased in size while mainline denominations lost members. Although the mainline denominations listed in Table 1.3 experienced an almost 7 percent decline in adherents overall, the 36 evangelical denominations listed in Table 1.4 experienced more than an eleven percent increase in adherents from 1990 to 2000. Some evangelical denominations, such as the Assemblies of God and the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, had increases of between 15 and 20 percent. Other, smaller denominations experienced even larger percentage increases, although their absolute numbers are small compared to those of the major denominations.

Of significance to the political fortunes of the conservative Christian agenda has been the continuing rise in the membership of evangelical denominations and the fall in membership of mainline churches, as well as the strong tendency of mainline church laity to support more conservative political positions and to vote for Republican candidates. Kohut et al. (2000, 32) categorize respondents as more highly committed or less highly committed religiously, basing these categories on the level of religious practice and acceptance of traditional beliefs and noting that the percentage of committed evangelical Protestants increased slightly (from 23.9 percent in 1965 to 25.4 percent in 1996).

The proportion of committed members declined among mainline denominations, Roman Catholics, and black Protestants. Findings from the 1994–1996 Pew surveys regarding religious affiliation and political party identification indicate that 46 percent of committed evangelical Protestants identified with the Republican party, compared to 33 percent of less committed evangelicals, 42 percent of more committed mainline Protestants, and 32 percent of less com-

TABLE 1.4 Total Reported Adherents for Fundamentalist Denominations, 1990 and 2000

<i>Fundamentalist Denomination</i>	<i>Adherents in 2000</i>	<i>Adherents in 1990</i>	<i>Percent Change</i>
<i>Denominations with 50,000 to 100,000 Adherents</i>			
Conservative Congregational Christian Conference	50,940	35,600	43.1
North American Baptist Conference	59,545	54,010	10.25
Cumberland Presbyterian Church	77,686	91,040	-14.67
International Churches of Christ	79,161	NR	NR
Evangelical Presbyterians	80,207	45,464	76.42
Church of God of Prophecy	91,106	91,861	-0.82
Free Methodist Church of North America	96,237	82,766	16.28
Subtotal	534,882	460,741	33.5%
<i>Denominations with 100,000 to 240,000 Adherents</i>			
Pentecostal Church of God	101,921	91,072	11.91
New Testament Association of Independent Baptist Churches and Other Fundamentalist Baptists	132,684	NR	NR
Evangelical Covenant Church	153,116	NR	NR
Vineyard USA	155,170	NR	NR
Mennonite Church USA	156,345	154,259	1.35
Conservative Baptist Association of America	224,306	NR	NR
Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)	238,609	232,876	2.46
Baptist General Conference	238,920	167,874	42.32
Subtotal	1,401,071	646,081	116.9

(continues)

TABLE 1.4 (continued)

<i>Fundamentalist Denomination</i>	<i>Adherents in 2000</i>	<i>Adherents in 1990</i>	<i>Percent Change</i>
<i>Denominations with 240,000 to 330,000 Adherents</i>			
International Pentecostal Holiness Church	241,828	157,728	53.32
General Association of Regular Baptists	245,636	NR	NR
Christian Reformed Church in North America	248,938	226,163	10.07
National Association of Free Will Baptists	254,170	293,448	-13.38
American Baptist Association	280,973	NR	NR
Evangelical Free Church	285,699	181,692	57.24
Baptist Missionary Association of America	295,239	289,969	1.82
Presbyterian Church in America	315,293	221,392	42.41
Subtotal	2,167,776	1,370,392	58.2
<i>Denominations with 330,000 to 1,000,000 Adherents</i>			
Christian and Missionary Alliances	331,106	271,865	21.79
International Church of the Foursquare Gospel	347,367	255,092	36.17
Wesleyan	381,459	259,740	46.86
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	405,078	419,928	-3.54
Church of the Nazarene	907,331	888,123	2.16
Seventh-Day Adventist	923,046	903,062	2.21
Independent, Charismatic Churches	935,168	794,254	17.74
Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)	974,198	695,074	40.16
Subtotal	5,204,753	4,487,138	16.0

(continues)

TABLE 1.4 (continued)

<i>Fundamentalist Denomination</i>	<i>Adherents in 2000</i>	<i>Adherents in 1990</i>	<i>Percent Change</i>
<i>Denominations with more than 1,000,000 Adherents</i>			
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	1,439,253	1,213,188	18.63
Churches of Christ	1,645,584	1,681,013	-2.11
Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod	2,521,062	2,603,725	-3.17
Assembly of God	2,561,998	2,161,610	18.52
Southern Baptist	19,881,467	18,940,682	4.97
Subtotal	28,049,364	26,600,218	5.5
Total Adherents Reported in 2000 and 1990	37,357,846	33,504,576	11.5

Sources: Bradley, Martin B., Norman M. Green, Jr., Dale E. Jones, Mac Lynn, and Lou McNeil. 1992. *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990*. Atlanta, GA: Glenmary Research Center; Jones, Dale E., Sherri Doty, James E. Horsch, Richard Houseal, Mac Lynn, John P. Marcum, Kenneth M. Sanchagrin, and Richard H. Taylor. 2002. *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000: An Enumeration by Region, State, and County Based on Data Reported by 149 Religious Bodies*. Nashville, TN: Glenmary Research Center.

mitted mainline Protestants. Only 19 percent of nonreligious people reported a strong Republican party identification. However, in addition to the increased numbers of conservative Christians, there has been an increase in the number of Americans who do not identify with any religious group (Kohut et al. 2000, 75).

Survey data comparing religious affiliations in 1965 and 1996 indicate that the largest percentage gain was in the secular category, which includes those stating no religious preference as well as respondents stating that they are atheists or agnostics. This category increased from 9.7 percent of respondents in a 1965 Gallup poll to 16.3 percent of those sampled in the 1996 Pew Religion Survey (Kohut et al. 2000, 18). Therefore, two disparate trends can be highlighted: increasing numbers of adherents in more evangelical

churches, but also an increasing number of Americans who deny any affiliation with an organized religion. Employing data from the 1996 National Election Study, Kohut et al. (2000, 55) conclude that seculars are more liberal than other religious groups on social, sexual, and cultural issues as well as on defense, although they are slightly more conservative than the general sample on the scope of government activity. The major losers in these two trends are the mainline churches, which have been caught between these opposing pulls. Unlike both mainline and evangelical Protestants, who tend to support the Republican party, those with no religious affiliation are more likely to back the Democratic party. Therefore, the fortunes of the two major political parties may depend to some extent on trends in religious affiliation and nonaffiliation, as well as on the propensity of each group to participate in elections.

The racial composition of fundamentalist denominations is important to understanding the political partisanship of their members. Black conservative Christians may be as religiously conservative as their white neighbors; but while many white conservative Christians have begun to identify themselves as Republicans and independents, most black conservative Christians continue to consider themselves Democrats. Black conservative Christians are an important part of fundamentalist churches. When members of all of the fundamentalist denominations examined in this book were surveyed for the General Social Survey, 79 percent were white and 19 percent were black (2 percent were categorized as “other”). Mainline denomination members, on the other hand, were found to be 90 percent white and 9 percent black.

From 1964 onward, two-thirds or more of black voters have identified themselves as Democrats. In their study of generational change and party identification, Stanley and Niemi (2001, 341) declared that the impact of political events associated with the civil rights movement and national partisan competition for the black vote were so intrusive as to complicate any effort at analyzing changes in black party identification. Similarly, our analyses of voting and partisanship among conservative Christians were also complicated by racial factors. We make a more detailed examination of the effects of race and partisanship within three fundamentalist churches in chapter 4. But the gist is that race matters more than religion in determining the partisanship of most black conservative Christians and that this group can embrace a liberal social issue without surrendering their conservative religious stance.

Conservative Christians and Political Issues

The presidency of Jimmy Carter was one of the factors that led conservative Christian leaders like Jerry Falwell to enter the political arena. Carter, a Southern Baptist, attracted support from evangelicals for his run for the presidency in 1976. However, once he became president, Carter disappointed many evangelicals with the liberal positions he took on issues of concern to them, such as abortion. The leadership of the Christian right largely deserted Carter in the 1980 election, instead backing Ronald Reagan. When Reagan assumed the presidency, he did not disappoint his conservative Christian backers, supporting constitutional amendments to allow prayer in the public schools and to ban abortion.

Although mainline churches supported the notion of the social gospel throughout the twentieth century, more conservative Christian organizations, as they became more active in the 1970s, emphasized what has been called a civic gospel, which involved the reemergence of the old themes of individual salvation and responsibility but with an added emphasis on the Bible as the source of the nation's moral principles. Billy James Hargis was an earlier and more strident example of this propensity to associate biblical principles with a national purpose. In the 1950s, Hargis added patriotism and anticommunism to the fundamentalist Christian theme. Conservative principles were offered as an alternative to the more liberal programs of the mainline churches and the seculars. Advocates of the civic gospel saw a connection between Christian orthodoxy and a free enterprise system. As for social welfare programs, some evangelicals supported cooperation between government and private faith-based organizations, believing that both the physical as well as the spiritual needs of the less advantaged should be addressed. They rejected the perceived standard liberal tendency to focus solely on the physical needs of the poor. Being an orthodox Christian was seen as requiring a particular political commitment. For instance, Guth et al. (1997, 64) report findings from the 1990–1991 Wheaton Religious Activist Study that two-thirds of the most orthodox Christian clergy agree that it would be “hard to be both a true Christian and a political liberal.”

Although President Clinton maintained relatively high ratings in the polls for the job he was doing during his second term in office, many Americans were troubled with the perceived lack of moral leadership due to his admitted affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky and the charges that the president had lied under oath about the affair. For many conservative Christians, such revelations

confirmed their belief that the Republican party was the party of stability and moral rectitude and that it should be returned to power. However, Kohut et al. (2000, 93), reporting findings from the 1998 National Election Study, point out that only among committed evangelical Protestants did a majority (56 percent) favor President Clinton's impeachment. Thirty-four percent of both less committed evangelicals and committed mainline Protestants favored efforts to impeach President Clinton. Smaller percentages of other groups supported impeachment efforts. For instance, 19 percent of less committed mainline Protestants, 7 percent of committed black Protestants, and just 3 percent of less committed black Protestants favored impeachment. Among seculars, 21 percent supported removing Clinton from office.

Since September 11, 2001, certain conservative Christian leaders have increasingly perceived the United States and Israel as allies in the struggle against terrorism. In October 2002, Falwell, appearing on CBS television's *60 Minutes*, stated that Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was a terrorist. This statement was the most recent in a series of critical comments made by conservative Christian leaders about the founder of Islam. Pat Robertson had previously referred to Muhammad as "a robber and a brigand," and Billy Graham's son Franklin Graham had labeled Islam an evil and wicked religion. Graham criticized American Muslims for their failure to speak out publicly against the September 11, 2001, terrorists attacks, stating that this silence was evidence that these Muslims agreed that the terrorists were fighting "a just and holy war." The press criticized such statements by conservative Christian leaders, claiming that they were indicative of a hate-filled campaign of intolerance that could have serious consequences for the rights of many Americans. Nonetheless, many Christian groups and publications continued to emphasize the differences between Islam and Christianity and to proclaim the superiority of the Christian faith.

The sometimes avidly anti-Islamic rhetoric of some conservative Christian leaders can be partly explained by a phenomenon called Christian Zionism (Kohut 2000, 50), which predates the September 11 attacks. Many conservative Christians express strong support for the state of Israel. Since the 1980s, Israeli leaders, especially those of the conservative Likud party, have in turn cultivated close relationships with conservative Christian leaders. In 1996, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu established the Israel Christian Advocacy Council to nurture support for Israel (Silverstein and Scherer 2002, 58). In July 2002, the Zionist Organization of America recognized Pat

Robertson for his efforts to assist Israel. In his defense of Israel, a San Antonio, Texas, preacher named John Hagee has offered a theological justification for Christian support of the Israeli nation. Hagee has argued that Jews have a unique covenant with God and therefore can receive salvation along with Christians, a claim to which other evangelicals have strongly objected (Utter and Storey 2001, 90). Hagee is reported to have raised more than \$1 million to help Jews from the former Soviet Union to resettle in Israel. For such efforts, Hagee received expressions of appreciation from Jewish organizations.

This unlikely alliance between conservative Christians and Israel includes leaders such as Edward McAteer of the Religious Roundtable. Based on their interpretation of Daniel, Revelation, and other prophetic books of the Bible, many conservative Christians view Israel as an important ingredient in what they believe will be the events leading to the end times and the return of Christ. Because President George W. Bush is considered by many to be especially receptive to conservative Christian groups, conservative Christian leaders have pushed hard for the U.S. government to continue its support for Israel. Marshall Wittmann, a former lobbyist with the Christian Coalition, is reported to have identified evangelicals as a major force in communicating the Israeli message to the White House (Silverstein and Scherer, 2002, 59). Critics of evangelical support for Israel claim that evangelicals are more concerned about providing support for that nation than obtaining a peaceful resolution to the Mideast conflict.

When George W. Bush ran for the presidency, he used the theme of compassionate conservatism: Government should show appropriate concern for the economic as well as the moral well-being of the less advantaged. Bush emphasized the so-called faith-based initiative, which involved cooperation between government and religious organizations in providing social welfare services and rehabilitation programs such as treatment for drug addiction. After taking office, President Bush appointed John J. DiIulio Jr., a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, to head the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. However, DiIulio quickly became disillusioned over conflicts that emerged in Congress and among conservative Christians over policy questions regarding the granting of federal funds to religious charities. He resigned in August 2001. In November 2002, in an *Esquire* magazine interview, DiIulio strongly criticized the Bush White House for the overly political nature of its domestic policymaking, calling it "the reign of the Mayberry Machiavellis." In the meantime, because of the strong opposition facing related proposed

legislation in Congress, the Bush administration decided to implement a program of faith-based initiatives through executive orders.

Guth et al. (1997, 143–144), in their study of the political activism of Protestant clergy, note that evangelical clergy have a significant advantage over their mainline colleagues: Evangelical church members are more likely to attend services than are mainline church adherents. Mainline laity are less accepting of pastoral leadership than evangelicals, and thus evangelical pastors can rely more confidently on their claim to have biblical sanction for their social and political pronouncements. Guth et al. also observe that the political activism of more liberal clergy slowed considerably when congregations objected to such political involvement (1997, 156). They note that conservative clergy, who have greater support from their congregations, tend to participate politically from the vantage point of traditional religious structures, whereas liberal clergy, who face opposition to pastoral political activism from within their congregations, tend to participate as individuals and not as representatives of their denominations (1997, 167). Evangelical clergy are also in greater agreement with their congregations on political matters than are mainline clergy. However, evangelicals face a limitation on their ability to cooperate across denominational lines. As Ted Jelen (1991) observes, each of these more orthodox groups tends to believe they possess the true faith, to the exclusion of others. For instance, independent Baptist clergy have been hesitant to form alliances with Pentecostals, considering them to be theologically heretical for emphasizing such allegedly questionable concerns as “gifts of the spirit.”

Guth et al. (1997) observe that the issues of greatest concern to evangelicals include support for the pro-life position on the abortion question, the teaching of creationism (or at least intelligent design) and the official sanctioning of prayer in the public schools, and opposition to illegal drugs and the gay rights movement. In contrast, mainline churches have emphasized the need to cut defense spending, protect the environment, maintain affirmative action as a means of rectifying discrimination, and establish a national health care system. Although mainline Protestant churches have continued to focus on a “social justice agenda,” the evangelical churches have maintained a “moral reform” agenda, striving for major alterations in individual behavior by discouraging such practices as gambling and alcohol consumption and encouraging “family values.” Opposition to abortion persists as the primary focus of many conservative Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Sometimes the actions of nonreligious groups and individuals are perceived to confirm conservative Christians' belief that there is a crusade against Christians in the United States, especially when symbols of patriotism are combined with religious themes, as with the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag. In 2002, a suit was brought by a California man who claimed that the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance caused emotional harm to his eight-year-old daughter; the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decided in favor of the father. Many individuals and groups responded quickly to the decision, attacking the court's ruling and defending the reference to God in the Pledge. U.S. senators registered their support by reciting the Pledge en masse in Senate chambers and before the C-Span television cameras. In November 2002, Congress approved legislation—unanimously in the Senate and with just five dissenting votes in the House—reaffirming the reference to God in the Pledge and the phrase "in God we trust" as the national motto that appears on currency. President Bush quickly signed the bill into law. The legislation explicitly criticized the appeals court for its decision. Many on both sides of the appeals court ruling awaited a decision on the issue by the U.S. Supreme Court. An important question was whether the Supreme Court would consider its 1943 ruling in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (in which the justices decided that school officials could not force children to recite the pledge) represented a sufficient protection of individual rights or whether the Court would determine that the reference to God in the Pledge, like prayer in the public schools, must be eliminated in order to ensure the separation of church and state. The Court's ruling, announced in June 2004, did not resolve the ultimate question of the constitutionality of the Pledge. Five justices ruled that Michael Newdow, who brought the suit, lacked standing to bring the case before the courts because he did not have legal custody of his daughter. In concurring opinions, Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Clarence Thomas expressed the view that the Pledge did not violate the First Amendment.

As various religious groups, including evangelical Protestants, have become increasingly involved in politics, the American population appears to have become more accepting of that involvement. A 1968 Gallup poll reported that 53 percent of respondents believed that churches should avoid political involvement and that only 40 percent thought that churches should make known their positions on social and political questions. More than 30 years later, Americans appear to have become more tolerant of the participation of religious

groups in American politics. The 1996 Pew Center survey reported a reversal of the earlier findings: 54 percent of respondents agreed that churches should express their views on political matters, and 43 percent believed that churches should not (Kohut et al. 2000, 102). With regard specifically to conservative political involvement, Kohut et al. (2000, 120) report that 7 percent of all respondents claimed to be members of the religious right and 25 percent indicated that they supported the religious right.

Very likely, religious involvement in American politics will continue apace. With such issues as abortion, gay rights, prayer in the public schools, school choice, and pornography remaining on the public agenda, conservative Christians will find sufficient motivation to make their voices heard in the political arena. Groups opposed to the conservative Christian agenda can also be expected to continue their political activity in an attempt to limit the influence of that agenda on American government and society.

Conservative Christians and the Liberal Dilemma

Conservative Christians, like all other interests that participate in the American political process, must take the nature of the political culture into account when determining strategy. Robert Booth Fowler (1999) has argued persuasively that the general public in the United States maintains an overall consensus on classic liberal values, even though intellectuals since the 1960s, both liberal and conservative, have expressed increased disapproval with the claim that an overarching liberal framework continues to prevail. Most Americans today consider liberalism to be characterized by a large central government and the amelioration of the excesses of a market economy, with some features of a welfare state. However, that is not what liberalism has meant in the United States in a classic sense. By classic liberal values, Fowler means primarily a concern for the individual person and “his or her rights, wishes, and self-expression in public life” (1999, 100). Classic liberal values also include a commitment to political equality, equality of economic opportunity, and support for the country’s political institutions and the limited market economy. Religious groups do not and cannot exist in a social vacuum if they wish to participate effectively in the political realm, despite the pleas of many conservative Christians to the contrary that faithful Christians must separate themselves from the overall secular society.

Fowler identifies three trends in liberal influence on religious groups in the United States that affect their characteristics and interaction with the rest of society. First, individual authority has increased, and participation in organized religion has become a decidedly voluntary activity. This trend has affected the mainline churches most heavily, as is shown in the membership declines in these denominations in recent years. The second trend involves the increasing pluralism both between and within organized churches, to the extent that, Fowler concludes, many “consider themselves virtually a church of one” (1999, 143). The third trend is the increase in the market characteristics of American religion. As religion has become a more individualized activity, denominations have introduced methods for attracting people who can make individual choices, based on personal preference. Fowler notes that more conservative organizations such as Focus on the Family have succeeded in attracting supporters because they appeal specifically to the area of the family, a significant element in the classic liberal valuation of the private sphere (1999, 146).

If Fowler is correct in his assertion that basic classic liberal values celebrating the ascendancy of the individual predominate in American culture, then it is not surprising that conservative Christian groups often emphasize just these values in their political activities and appeals to the general public. Viewed in this light, oral prayer in the public schools becomes a question of freedom of speech and free exercise of religion. Opposition to abortion becomes an issue of right to life. However, underlying the conservative Christian agenda is a desire to nurture a community of common values based on the Christian tradition, which many consider to have contributed vitally to the foundation of the nation (see, for instance, Novak 2001). The success of conservative Christians in achieving their goals through political participation depends to a large extent on their ability to balance an appeal to the values of classic liberal individualism with the commitment to maintain or create a larger Christian community.

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