Political Religion and Church-State Issues

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Abstract

In this paper we examine public attitudes on the role of religion in the American political process, as well as some public policy implications of those attitudes. Although the current American legal regime may lean toward strict separationism, the political system has seen renewed religious activism over the past three decades. Historically, religious involvement in American politics has been quite common, but it has assumed new forms in recent years, as some religious groups have sought more accommodating relations between church and state. Thus, the sources of public support for religious activism are especially important for understanding the future for church-state issues, both those based on the First Amendment's religion clauses and other policy questions touching religious values.

To explain public attitudes on religious activism, we first review and evaluate two theories that underlie many interpretations of religion's role in American politics, namely, the ethnoreligious and the religious restructuring perspectives. We argue that both perspectives may help us identify support for religious politics; we then use a hybrid classification to examine public reaction to religious politics in 2004. Next, we examine in depth the religious, political and demographic factors influencing Americans' views on religion in politics. Finally, we consider the substantive implications of these findings for the future of church-state questions and for other religiously related constitutional issues.

The 2004 presidential election provided an excellent window into religion's role in contemporary American politics. Indeed, religion infused almost every part of the campaign. As one analysis put it, President Bush "showed himself willing to use religion forcefully to sharpen partisan divisions and highlight his own qualities as a leader," while Kerry and the Democrats "faced obstacles in using religious rhetoric, in appealing to religion to underscore his qualities as a leader, and in benefiting from the political organization of religious groups." Religion, this analysis concluded, "was at the heart of the campaign" (Muirhead et al. 2005, 222).

Political scientists today are in a better position than ever to gauge the validity of that assertion. In recent years they have made important strides in understanding religion's influence over political attitudes and behavior, both in the mass public and among activists. Indeed, religious variables routinely appear in the best analyses of voting (Miller and Shanks 1996), citizen activism (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), and party politics (Layman 2001). And after the 2004 campaign a rich literature quickly emerged assessing religion's influence on the results (Guth et al. 2006; Green, Wilcox and Rozell, 2006; Campbell, 2007).

What has seldom been explored, however, is Americans' basic orientation toward religious activity in political life. To what extent do citizens support the activity of religious groups, leaders and believers in the political world? What difference does it make to the policy environment, especially on church-state concerns? This paper begins to address those questions.

Religious Politics: Two Perspectives

Anyone perusing the burgeoning literature on religious politics is likely to be confused by many different classifications used by analysts. We think a scheme which taps best all the vital facets of religious faith will provide the most insight. To construct such a classification we must consider two competing views: the *ethnoreligious* perspective, stressing religious *affiliation* as

the key to understanding, and the *religious restructuring* perspective, emphasizing changing patterns of *belief* and *behavior*.

1. The Ethnoreligious Perspective: The Centrality of Religious Traditions

Pollsters and pundits have long relied implicitly on an *ethnoreligious* interpretation of American politics. As developed by historians, this theory identifies the key religious groups as the historic denominations born in Europe and later multiplying on America's shores. Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists and a myriad other Protestants combined distinct religious worldviews with other cultural attributes, such as ethnicity, race or regional location. Protestants were soon joined by other traditions, including Catholics, Jews, Eastern Orthodox and other religious "minorities." All these groups developed their own political cultures—often in conflict with neighboring religious groups—cultures fostered by religious leaders, houses of worship, and ethnic neighborhoods. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, American party politics involved competing alliances of ethnoreligious groups (Jensen 1971; Kleppner 1979).[1]

The historical pattern was simple in outline—but complex in practice. In the North, the Whigs, and later the Republicans, wooed "pietist" or "evangelical" Protestants, while Democrats mobilized "liturgical" or "ritualistic" Catholics, Lutherans, Jews and Orthodox Christians, along with free-thinkers and some dissident Protestants. Republican and Democratic religious groups differed in moral worldviews, lifestyles and attitudes about the proper role of government. The Whig/Republican coalition was especially prone to favor a strong role for government in promoting public and private morality, while the diverse Democratic constituencies preferred neutral government and "personal liberty." Campaigns sought to maximize the vote among a

[1] We prefer "ethnoreligious" in preference to the "ethnocultural" label used by most historians (McCormick 1974) to keep our focus on the religious aspect of this interpretation of American electoral politics.

party's core religious supporters and win over critical religious groups not strongly aligned with either (Jensen 1971).

By the 20th century, this pattern changed as the previously dominant Protestant communities divided into two competing traditions, the Evangelical and the Mainline, with the former predominating in the "Solid Democratic" South and the latter among Republicans in the North. And by the 1930s, Catholics emerged as the core of the Democratic Party outside the former Confederacy (Prendergast 1999). By the 1980s, however, Evangelicals were gravitating toward the GOP, while Catholics and Mainline Protestants wavered in their previous partisan commitments. By this time as well, Hispanic Catholics and Protestants, Muslims, Hindus and other religious traditions had appeared on the scene (Eck 2001), further complicating the ethnoreligious landscape—and the calculations of politicians.

Whatever the transformations in American religion over time, the ethnoreligious perspective directs attention to the real communities in which people live their religious lives, rather than simply positing artificial categories, such as "conservative Christians" (Greeley and Hout 2006) or "born-again Christians," often used by pollsters and pundits. Members of Black Protestant denominations, for example, are socialized religiously, understand Christian doctrines, and practice their faith differently from denizens of white Evangelical churches, despite many religious commonalities, such as orthodox beliefs and "born-again" status. Similarly, adherents to the Presbyterian Church in America, an Evangelical church, participate in a very different religious milieu than members of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., a Mainline body, despite common (but distant) roots in European Calvinism.

Although some sociologists have announced the "end of denomination" (see below), affiliation with a church in the historic Evangelical, Mainline Protestant or Catholic traditions

may still matter, in part because such membership is "elective" today, allowing believers to choose a congenial religious environment (Green and Guth 1993). And for many "new" communities, such as Hispanic Catholics, the tight religious, ethnic and family bonds that once characterized "old" ethnoreligious groups such Irish Catholics may still be operative (Stevens 2004). Thus, affiliation with either the historic or the newer traditions is likely to identify vital aspects of American religion. And despite recent theoretical challenges, the ethnoreligious approach is still followed in rough and ready fashion by researchers, although often without much reflection. The most global affiliation measure is the "Protestant, Catholic, Jewish" trilogy that Will Herberg (1955) used in defining the religious underpinnings of American civic life. Although this formula was simplistic even when coined, expanded versions still appear in empirical research. For example, the 2004 election exit poll merely added "Mormon, Muslim, Other Christian, Something Else, and None" to Herberg's trilogy (National Election Pool 2004).

Even when elaborated by additional measures (such as race or ethnicity) such questions go only a small way toward identifying the actual religious tradition within which voters move. First, as Stark and Glock noted years ago, when researchers talk about "Protestants" they "spin statistical fictions" (1968, 56). At the very least, one must distinguish between the Evangelical, Mainline and Black Protestant traditions (Kellstedt and Green 1993). In addition, categories such as "Other Christian" and "Something Else" lack even face validity and, empirically, are often erroneously chosen by many people who clearly belong to an established denomination or tradition. Other widely used surveys, such as those of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (and some exit polls), do make the critical distinction between "Evangelical" and "Mainline" Protestants, achieved by classifying "born-again" Protestants as "Evangelical" and all others as "Mainline." Unfortunately, this economical shortcut puts many Evangelical church

members in the Mainline camp and classifies many Mainliners as Evangelicals (Jelen, Smidt and Wilcox 1993). A better approach is that of the American National Election Studies (ANES), where detailed affiliation probes permit accurate assignments to religious traditions (see Leege and Kellstedt 1993). If religious traditions still matter in politics, then precise affiliation measures are critical to discovering how they matter.

2. Religious Classification: Religious Restructuring and "Traditionalism-Modernism"

Although many analysts still focus on religious tradition, variously defined (Manza and Brooks 1999; Steensland et al. 2000; Layman 2001), some sociologists argue that ethnoreligious analysis has progressively less utility in describing religious life and its implications for politics. As ascriptive affiliations break down, Americans move more freely among religious settings, ignoring the old ties of doctrine, denomination, ethnicity, region and even family (Ammerman 1997). As people re-sort themselves into congenial theological environments, American religion has been "restructured" into two camps with opposing worldviews, fostered by competing religious institutions and leaders. As Robert Wuthnow (1988) and James Davison Hunter (1991) have argued, old religious traditions have been polarized by theological, social and cultural conflicts into a "conservative" or "orthodox" faction on one side, and a "liberal" or "progressive" one on the other. And for some theorists, the growing number of secular Americans is a natural extension of the "liberal" or "progressive" side—and may even be the product of struggles over restructuring (Hout and Fischer 2002). Wuthnow saw such developments splitting religious institutions, but Hunter's apocalyptic title, "Culture Wars," projected the divisions into the polity, as a threat to social stability.

Although scholarly reaction to the "culture wars" notion has often focused on those purported political manifestations (Williams 1997; Fiorina 2005; Nivoli and Brady 2006),

Wuthnow and Hunter's original formulations were rooted in theological developments, especially the emergence of opposing worldviews: the competing camps are characterized by alternative belief systems, different religious observances, and adherence to rival religious movements. Indeed, the identification of these competing forces constitutes the most valuable insight of the restructuring perspective. Scholars employ various names for the resulting factions, but for simplicity we will use "traditionalist" and "modernist."

Although critics are rightly skeptical about extreme statements of the restructuring theory, evidence for a milder version is convincing, especially in "old-line" American religious institutions. The religious press reveals continual battles between traditionalists and modernists in almost every major Protestant body, as well as in the American Catholic Church. Although rooted in theology and practice, these struggles also produce opposing moral, social, economic and political perspectives. True, "culture war" theorists consistently overstate the consequent polarization, both within religious institutions and the mass public: there are "centrists" in the religious wars, and "moderates" in the political wars. But the religious divisions they identify may well influence politics, if only because both religious and political elites are polarized, thus shaping the cues presented to the public (Guth et al. 1997; Fiorina 2005).

Ideally, then, to tap these worldviews the researcher must ask about religious behaviors, beliefs, and movement affiliations. Although few political surveys measure these facets of religion adequately, some common items do get at one or another dimension, if only inadvertently. The most frequently employed are measures of religious behavior. According to Wuthnow and Hunter, traditionalists and modernists differ in religious practice, with traditionalists more faithful in "normative" practices, such as attendance at worship. Indeed, church attendance has been the most commonly employed religious measure in recent years. In

2004, for example, the “religion gap” referred to Bush’s advantage among church-goers and Kerry’s among non-attendees (e.g. Fiorina 2005; Muirhead et al. 2005). But attendance is just one measure of religious behavior. Recent ANES surveys add frequency of private prayer and Bible reading, which also tap the underlying factional division. Although Bible reading may be more common among Protestants, especially Evangelicals, alternative items may work well for other traditions. Modernist Catholics, for example, are less likely to say the rosary or attend confession than are traditionalists. Unfortunately, space limitations often work against multiple behavior items in surveys, especially those tailored to specific traditions.

Perhaps most critical to the traditionalist-modernist divide are differences in religious belief. Unfortunately, most academic surveys have few, if any, belief items, making it difficult to assess the political impact of religious restructuring. The sole exception is often an item on scriptural authority, one that does tap a key disagreement: whether moral authority is supernatural or conventional in origin (Hunter 1991, 120ff). The ANES Bible item (like most others) produces skewed responses, with very high levels of “orthodoxy” (Kellstedt and Smidt 1993). Thus, analysts are often left with no really useful items at all to gauge theological orientations.

Finally, some common questions tap the third aspect of religious restructuring: identification with religious movements (Kellstedt and Green 1993). Long a part of the American religious scene, such movements seek to transform their religious traditions, either by “returning to the roots” or by “bringing the faith in line with the modern world.” In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, American Protestantism spawned the “holiness,” “pentecostal,” or “fundamentalist” movements on the traditionalist side, and the “liberal,” “modernist,” or “ecumenical” ones on the “modernizing” side. Even today various Protestant movements

"attempt to restore traditions and doctrines that are perceived to have been lost, while others chart new ways of faith and practice" (Cimino 2001, 7). Catholicism and Judaism have seen similar developments, although labels for competing movements differ from those Protestants use (Steinfels 2003; Goldscheider and Zuckerman 1984).

Indeed, public and academic parlance frequently employs movement labels, usually from Protestant traditions. Polls often ask whether respondents think of themselves as "fundamentalist," "evangelical," "conservative," or "liberal or progressive" Christians—in an effort to tap the explanatory power of movement identification. In fact, political scientists and sociologists have energetically tested such measures, but with only mixed success (Wilcox, Jelen and Leege, 1993; Smith 1998). This should not be surprising: "movement" language varies by tradition, and many Americans are unfamiliar with such terms, especially those originating outside their own tradition. Thus, unwary use of items asking about "fundamentalist" or "evangelical" identification often produces problematic results. We have not used such identifications in creating our religious classification, but we will utilize a new way to measure believers' preference for traditionalist and modernizing movements within their churches, one that taps directly this aspect of religious "restructuring."

To summarize our argument: we think both ethnoreligious and restructuring perspectives may supply vital insight into how Americans see the appropriate role of religion in political life. Our expectations are fairly simple and direct, derived from the both the ethnoreligious and restructuring literatures. From the former, we anticipate that historically dominant Protestant traditions should approve more readily the infusion of religious values into the political process, whereas "minority," "out-group," and non-religious Americans should take a more hostile view. Of course, such prediction may be complicated by changes over time: Evangelicals and white

Catholics, for example, were once "out-groups" and thus skeptical of religious intervention in politics, but now are part of the "culturally dominant" religious mainstream. From restructuring theory, on the other hand, we expect that traditionalists in all religious groups will support religious politics, while modernists (and secular allies) should resist such incursions, seeing them as an illegitimate imposition of religious values, an "establishment of religion."

Data and Methods

To test our expectations, we use the Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics (NSRP), conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Akron, and co-sponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.[2] The NSRP's advantages are several. First, the large sample allows us to examine religious subgroups with statistical confidence. The NSRP polled a random sample of 4,000 adults between February and April 2004 and reinterviewed 2,730 respondents right after the fall election. Second, the NSRP employs detailed affiliation probes for accurate classification of respondents into religious traditions (Kellstedt and Green 1993; Green et al. 1996) and also includes belief, behavior, and movement questions, integral to the restructuring approach.[3] Some measures, such as church attendance, are similar to items in other surveys, but some, like belief in God and Biblical authority, are expanded to produce more meaningful response options. All told, the religious batteries permit construction of a classification combining ethnoreligious and restructuring perspectives.

For purposes of exposition, then, we divided the three large Christian traditions (Evangelicals, Mainline Protestants and white Catholics) into "traditionalist," "centrist," "modernist" and "nominal" factions, in line with our theory. To characterize each briefly,

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[2] Additional support for the post-election part of the survey was provided by the Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics at Calvin College and the William R. Kenan, Jr. Endowment at Furman University.

[3] See Green et al. 2007 for more on the survey items used in these classifications.

traditionalists hold orthodox beliefs, engage frequently in normative religious behaviors, and want their religious institutions to preserve traditional beliefs and practices. Modernists, on the other side, reject orthodoxy and embrace new religious ideas, participate less frequently in normative religious behaviors, and ask their religious communities to adopt beliefs and practices consistent with modern ideas. Centrists fall in the middle: they hold moderately orthodox beliefs, are somewhat active religiously, but tend not to identify with religious movements. Finally, we include "nominals" in each tradition: respondents who gave a denominational affiliation when asked, but who show little evidence of any religious commitment or involvement.

For both practical and theoretical reasons, we do not report traditionalist-modernist divisions among Hispanic Protestants and Catholics, Jews, Black Protestants or other categories. First, the numbers are often too small to subdivide with confidence. And ethnoreligious theory also suggests that these traditions are still shaped more by racial, ethnic or religious solidarity than by restructuring. This is generally the case, but we do find evidence that the traditionalist-modernist division has appeared in these religious bodies as well. In 2004, for example, traditionalists in these groups were somewhat more likely than their centrist or modernist counterparts to approve religious involvement in political life. If this trend continues, religious restructuring may influence more deeply the politics of these ethnoreligious traditions.

Support for Religion in Political Life in 2004

Do Americans support religious involvement in politics? To answer this question, we used five items tapping the extent to which Americans were willing to entertain religious groups, influences, and considerations in politics:

> Thinking about religion and politics, do you completely agree, agree, disagree or complete disagree with the following statements?
> 1. "Organized religious groups should stand up for their beliefs in politics."
> 2. "Organized religious groups of all kinds should stay out of politics."

3. “It makes me uncomfortable when politicians talk about their personal religious beliefs.”
4. “It is important to me that a president has strong religious beliefs.”
5. “On a scale where 1 means that your religion is very important to your political thinking and 5 means that your religion is not at all important to your political thinking where would you place yourself?”

Table 1 reports the responses, both from the entire public and from individual religious groups.[4]

[Table 1 about here]

First, we notice that Americans are fairly receptive to religious involvement. Three-quarters say that religious groups should stand up for their beliefs in politics, over two-thirds want the president to have a strong religious faith, a solid majority is comfortable with politicians who discuss their religious faith, a majority rejects the notion that religious groups should stay out of politics, and almost two-fifths say that their faith is “very important” or “quite important” in their political thinking.[5] On the whole, then, Americans are hardly adverse to religious influences in the public square.[6] An additive index of these items standardized to run from zero (absolutely no support for religion in political life) to one hundred (highest possible support) reveals a mean of 56 for the eligible electorate, solidly on the positive side. Hereafter we shall call this as the *political religion* scale.[7]

Still, not all religious groups are enamored of religious politics. Table 1 shows enormous intergroup variation. Not surprisingly, Evangelicals express the strongest support for political

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[4] We inserted “undecided” between “agree” and “disagree” on the first four items, creating five-point scales, and reversed direction on items 1, 4 and 5, so high scores represent positive views about religious activity in politics. Thus, each column of Table 1 reports the total for agreeing and strongly agreeing with religious involvement.
[5] A considerable additional number rate it as a “3,” in the mid-point of the scale. The post-election survey includes a specific item asking how important the respondent’s religious faith was to his or her *voting* decision. The results are comparable to those in Table 1, but because the post-election sample is considerably smaller than the pre-election one, we have not included this item in our analysis, although it fits nicely with the scale reported in the last column.
[6] This evidence is confirmed by similar results in an independent survey about the same time by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press: “GOP The Religion Friendly Party,” August 24, 2004. In the post-election NSRP survey, we found a similar level of support for political religion: only 33 percent of those polled thought there was too much emphasis on religion in the campaign, 35 percent thought that churches had been too engaged in discussing political issues, and only 27 percent felt religious groups had put too much effort into mobilizing voters.
[7] The five-item additive index created from these items has a very acceptable *alpha* reliability coefficient of .72.

religion, whatever their faction. The large coterie of Evangelical traditionalists has the highest ranking, while other Evangelical subgroups score above their Mainline or White Catholic counterparts. Even more noticeable is the precipitous drop in scores from traditionalists to nominals, especially on the index. The gaps are equally wide (at about 32 points) in all three major traditions. No wonder each has seen heated internal debates about the role of religious people and institutions in politics (Wuthnow 1989). Although the public as a whole is fairly positive about involvement, there are large pockets of resistance, especially from the modernist and marginal members. Thus, "culture wars" not only involve battles over issues such as abortion, gay rights and stem cell research, but also over the very propriety of religious politics.

The picture is complicated by the smaller traditions and non-religious citizens. Latter-day Saints score quite high on political religion, while Black Protestants also look very much like traditionalists on these items. (Of course, most of them *are* religious traditionalists.) This latter finding will surprise few observers of African-American history and politics, but it makes for an uncomfortable fit in the contemporary Democratic Party, deeply split over the legitimacy of religious politics. Hispanic Protestants score almost as high on most questions as Black Protestants, reflecting perhaps their location in predominantly Evangelical venues. Hispanic Catholics have a lower tolerance for religious politics, but are still above the national average, and fall between traditionalist and centrist white Catholics.

Generally speaking, the smallest religious traditions and secular citizens have much less liking for religiously-infused political life. Smaller Christian groups (e.g. Eastern Orthodox) score slightly below the national mean on the index, as do unaffiliated believers (mostly Christian by background). Jews and other non-Christian religions are much more negative about religion in public life (although most do think that religious groups should stand up for their

beliefs in politics if necessary). Finally, seculars and, especially, atheists and agnostics, exhibit little tolerance for political religion on most items or, naturally, on the summary score.

A mental reshuffling of Table 1 quickly reveals the broad configuration of conflict over religious politics. Traditionalists and centrists (especially Evangelicals), Black Protestants, Latter-day Saints, and Hispanic Protestants anchor the pro-political religion coalition, while modernists and nominals in the major traditions join many smaller traditions and secular voters on other side. On the surface, at least, the patterns suggest that both ethnoreligious and religious restructuring factors are at work: members of the larger "historic" American traditions, especially Evangelicals, tend to favor religious involvement, while smaller, less culturally dominant groups, such as Jews and other non-Christians, prefer strict barriers between religious faith and public life. But religious restructuring is also obvious: traditionalists favor public religion, while modernists, nominals, and seculars oppose it.

Factors Influencing Adherence to Political Religion

What forces produce this division over religion in public life? As we suggested above, both the traditional views of historic religious traditions toward involvement of their institutions, leaders and people in public life and the more recent attitudes of combatant groups in the "culture wars" may help us understand the current situation. Of course, other factors may influence attitudes toward political religion as well, including demographic traits, region, and political orientation. To assess such issues, Table 2 reports a series of multivariate analyses of attitudes toward political religion, as tapped by the overall index.

[Table 2 about here]

First, we incorporate the major religious traditions as "dummy variables," consolidating

some smaller groups for analysis.[8] We also include the major indicators of the restructuring approach, scores representing traditionalism in belief, behavior and religious orientation.[9] Next, we look at ideological and partisan self-identification, hypothesizing that conservatives and Republicans favor political religion more than liberals and Democrats do (cf. Jelen and Wilcox 1995: 93). Finally, we include controls for age, gender, education, marital status and region, to be confident that the differences in Table 1 are not mere artifacts of social class, personal status or regional culture. We examine each set of factors in sequence, and then combine them in a single regression analysis (OLS).

The first column shows the impact of religious affiliation alone. Clearly, Evangelicals are the strongest proponents of political religion, while the combined secular/atheist/agnostic category holds down the negative end. Black Protestants are also distinctly warmer toward religion in politics, while most other historic American traditions are also positive. On the other side, non-Christians and nominals from the major traditions are distinctly negative. Knowledge of a citizen's religious affiliation (or lack of it), then, does a respectable job in explaining the political religion score, accounting for almost 30 percent of the variance.

Nevertheless, the restructuring perspective proves more powerful. Generic religious orthodoxy, high religious activity, and preference for religious tradition over "modernization" all produce support for religious involvement in public life. Orthodox belief is most potent, followed at some distance by religious activity. These three scores alone explain over two-fifths

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[8] For ease of analysis, we combine all nominals from the major traditions in a single category, as they clearly have much more in common with secular voters than with the tradition to which they are nominally attached. This leaves the three major traditions with only those "members" who exhibit some degree of religious belief and involvement. We have also combined Jews and other non-Christian groups in a single "all non-Christian" category and have merged the seculars and atheist/agnostic group into a single "secular" category. The comparison groups in Table 2 are the "other Christian" and "unaffiliated believers" categories, both of which fall close to the center of the political religion scale. Thus, coefficients for these groups are not included in Table 2.

[9] For more details on the belief and behavior measures, see Green et al. 2007**.** The religious tradition/modernity item combines two questions asking respondents directly whether they preferred traditional beliefs and practices or modern ones in their denomination.

of the variance, considerably more than religious affiliation does.

Political factors also influence political religion. As Table 2 shows, conservatives are more likely to favor religion in public life (and liberals are more likely to oppose it). To a lesser extent Republicans and Democrats also differ, with the former friendlier to religion in the public square. Still, ideology and partisanship explain only about one fifth of the variation, much less than either set of religious variables. This demonstrates that both parties experience considerable internal conflict over political religion, hardly a surprise to those who have watched Democrats and Republicans struggle with this issue. Some demographic factors are statistically significant as well, but are only weak substantive predictors. On balance, higher education and income work modestly against religious influence, while being female, married and resident in a region other than the Northeast and Pacific Coast produces slightly more positive attitudes. All these factors combined, however, explain only a tiny amount of the variation. Thus, religious factors emerge as the most powerful explanations of citizens' political religion (cf. Guth et al. 1996).

This supposition is confirmed by the final column in Table 2, which shows the relative importance each variable has in a combined analysis. Clearly, "restructuring" factors are the most robust producers of political religion, with orthodoxy and religious activity retaining strong coefficients, even with all other variables in the equation. The ethnoreligious explanation has some value, as the "old" American traditions are still more favorable to religion in public life than other groups are, even when religious belief and behavior are taken into account. Evangelicals and Black Protestants lead the way, followed by White Catholics and Mainline Protestants. Note that Hispanic Protestants are also more positive about public religion. Interestingly, those in secular, nominal or non-Christian categories are no more opposed to political religion than their scores on the religious measures would predict.

Although religious factors clearly account for most of the variation, Republicans and conservatives are still significantly higher on political religion, even when their other traits and beliefs are taken into account. Thus, for example, a Republican Evangelical traditionalist will score higher on political religion than a Democratic counterpart who is alike in every other way. Most demographic factors drop out, however, except for very modest positive effects of residence in the Midwest, South or Border states. All this suggests that the divide over political religion is truly an ideological one, not rooted primarily in education, social class, or region.[10]

There is little doubt that adherence to political religion has been nurtured by Christian conservative leaders over the past twenty-five years. Using data from our post-election survey, we find that citizens who depend heavily on religious sources of information—especially religious radio and television, are significantly more likely than others to show strong support for political religion. Not surprisingly, those who feel close to the Christian Right are also much more likely to endorse religious involvement in politics—even when all other religious, political and demographic variables are taken into account (data not shown).

Consequences and Implications of Political Religion for Public Opinion on Church-State Issues

To this point we have discovered that Americans as a whole are quite open to public expression of religion in the political process, but that different religious groups have varying tolerance for such involvement. Traditionalists demonstrate the strongest support, but members of the larger historic traditions also seem warmer to political religion. Our findings might be nothing more than interesting oddities, were it not for the significant impact that religious mobilization has had in recent American politics. The social science literature is now

[10] Further analysis shows the contribution of each set of variables. If introduced in successive blocks, the religious tradition and restructuring variables account for .477 of the variance with only .030 added by the political and demographic factors.

burgeoning, demonstrating religion's influence on candidate choice, partisan affiliation, and political mobilization. Ironically, there has been much less attention to religion's influence over citizen attitudes about church and state. This neglect is especially troubling given the many ways public opinion influences policy in this arena, both directly and indirectly (for a pioneering discussion, see Jelen and Wilcox 1995).

In this final section, then, we consider how religious factors shape public opinion on five contemporary questions. Three embody classic church-state issues: (1) placing of religious symbols such as the Ten Commandments on public property; (2) government assistance to churches and religious organizations to provide social and humanitarian services ("charitable choice"); and, (3) government vouchers to parents of school children permitting them to attend parochial and other private schools. Each issue received sustained public and elite attention during the first Bush administration and in the 2004 election campaign (Guth 2004). In general, the underlying constitutional issue is how far government should accommodate religious beliefs, people, and institutions in public policy. While the fight over the Ten Commandments might seem mostly symbolic, Bush's "faith-based" initiative and the provision of educational vouchers entail important fiscal costs and new policy directions. Although these three items hardly exhaust the important church-state issues confronting the United States, they certainly tap an underlying "establishment" dimension.[11]

In addition, we include two other issues with important religious and legal implications: "life issues" (abortion and embryonic stem cell research) and gay issues (gay rights and same-sex marriage). Opinions on both are strongly related to religious values. Indeed, proponents of abortion rights and gay rights often argue that their opponents' preferred policies would amount

[11] As Jelen and Wilcox (1995) point out, Americans may divide somewhat differently on this dimension than on the "free exercise" dimension.

to an “establishment of religion,” although this argument has yet to be adopted by the Supreme Court.[12] Nevertheless, these issues may raise some of the same underlying questions as the more explicit church-state dimension represented by the first three. Empirically, as well, the five issues have considerable commonality, as voters tend to see them connected in fairly consistent ways.[13] Here we combine two items on abortion and stem-cell research as indicators of “pro-life” sentiment, and two items on gay rights and same-sex marriage to tap pro-gay policy attitudes.

We expect results comparable to those in our analysis of political religion: culturally dominant traditions should favor more “accommodation” of religion on church-state and related issues, joined by traditionalists from all religious groups. Similar patterns should obtain on life issues and gay rights. And, on the basis of previous research (Guth and Green, 1993; Guth et al. 1996), we also anticipate that those approving political religion should be even more supportive of church-state accommodation than those who share identical religious and demographic traits, but do not favor religious engagement in politics.

What do we find? In 2004 Americans had quite a range of opinion on these questions. Two-thirds of all citizens favored permitting the Ten Commandments to be posted on public property (Table 3). A bare majority of citizens favored government subsidies for church and religious organizations providing social and humanitarian services, while only about two-fifths supported school vouchers. Thirty-five percent were consistently pro-life, while over half scored consistently low on the pro-gay rights scale.[14]

[Table 3 about here]

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[12] For this argument, see Lynn (2006). Note, however, that such a rationale has been adopted by the courts in cases involving state-mandated teaching of creationism and “intelligent design” in public schools.
[13] The inter-correlations among the five scores considered here range from a low of .17 (between vouchers and gay rights) to a high of .47 (between life issues and gay rights).
[14] Respondents tended to be more “pro-life” on abortion than on stem-cell research, and were more supportive of gay rights generally than of same-sex marriage.

They also differ systematically by religious group. Indeed, the general pattern will look broadly familiar to careful readers of Table 1. Evangelical Protestants—especially traditionalists—are most accommodationist on each church-state issue, with almost universal support for public posting of the Commandments, strong support for charitable choice, and a narrow majority for school vouchers. Evangelical traditionalists are also the strongest pro-life and anti-gay rights contingent. Catholic traditionalists, although much less numerous, almost match their Evangelical counterparts (except for slightly weaker opposition to gay rights). Once again, support for accommodationist church-state policy falls dramatically from the traditionalists to nominal identifiers, with over a 30 point gap in each of the three major traditions. The gap is even wider on pro-life and gay rights issues—at the very center of the "culture wars." Latter-day Saints, Hispanic Protestants and Catholics, African-American Protestants and unaffiliated "believers" also lean toward the accommodationist side on at least two church-state issues, and score solidly in the pro-life and anti-gay rights camps as well. The "separationist" coalition is lead by atheist/agnostics, other seculars, Jews, other non-Christian faiths, and the "other Christian" category—with support from "nominals" in the three major traditions. These same groups occupy very similar locations on life and gay issues, constituting the vanguard of liberal opinion on both.

At this point we are ready for a more rigorous test of the factors influencing sentiment on church-state and "moral values" issues. First, we want to clarify how traditional ethnoreligious influences and the new restructuring factors influence attitudes. Secondly, we hope to determine whether citizens' attitudes toward religious involvement in political life augment support for accommodationist policy beyond that produced by their religious traits. Third, we include other customary influences over attitudes on political questions, to determine whether these religious

influences are independent, or are artifacts of other social and political variables.

Table 4 reveals that the dominant influences on each issue do vary, but exhibit some important common features. The most crucial finding is that *political religion* is a strong and consistent predictor of accommodationist positions on the church-state questions, pro-life attitudes, and anti-gay rights stances. On charitable choice and school vouchers it is by far the strongest influence, and on the other three issues it takes second place or third place. Thus, even when all other variables are in the equation, a citizen's endorsement of religious activity in the political process fosters support for embodying religious values and institutions in public policy. Almost the same consistency appears with ideology, as conservatism also serves to enhance religiously imbued attitudes on all five issues. Republican partisanship is not quite as constant or important an influence, but is present in four of the five cases.

[Table 4 about here]

The religious variables proper have different effects on each issue. Orthodoxy is a powerful predictor of views on the Ten Commandments, pro-life issues, and gay rights, but does not have an independent impact on charitable choice or vouchers. High levels of religious behavior matter on pro-life policies, school vouchers, and gay rights—in that order. A preference for religious tradition over modernism also has a modest conservatizing impact on the Ten Commandments, life-issues, and gay rights. On the other hand, one's religious tradition seems to have only a sporadic and generally modest independent impact—and only sometimes in the anticipated direction. All else being equal, Catholics are slightly more supportive of posting the Commandments in public places, but Hispanic Protestants and seculars are somewhat more skeptical of charitable choice. Mainline Protestants are more hostile to vouchers, while Hispanic Catholics are more favorable. Mainliners and non-Christians are even more pro-choice than their

other characteristics would predict, and Mainliners and White Catholics are more pro-gay rights than expected. But the independent impact of affiliation is relatively modest.

Demographic influences are also minor and sporadic. Higher education and higher income both push citizens toward stricter separationist, pro-choice and pro-gay rights attitudes. Youth are more open to charitable choice and school vouchers, and women are more liberal on three issues. Married citizens are slightly more prone to favor posting the Commandments and to oppose gay rights. Residence in a conservative region has a very modest impact on the same two issues. On the whole, though, religious factors dominate as influences on all five issues.

The evidence would also seem to tip the debate between the ethnoreligious and culture war theorists in favor of the latter—at least on these issues. Citizens' attitudes are much better predicted by theological traditionalism than by location in a particular religious tradition. Evangelicals may indeed be the accommodationist vanguard, but this reflects the preponderance of traditionalists in their ranks, not some special tenet or historic trait of Evangelical Protestantism. And although traditionalism is in itself an important influence, it becomes most powerful when coupled with a citizen's belief that religion is an acceptable or even desirable element in the political process.[15] Indeed, political religion appears to be the most consistent influence favoring an accommodationist posture on a wide range of issues.

Conclusions

Although there has been much debate over the existence of a political "culture war" in the United States, there has been little discussion of public attitudes toward the political involvement of religion, although these might seem to be front-line indicators of such divisions.

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[15] This "interactive" impact can be modeled in the equation by adding an interaction term measuring the impact of holding traditionalist views and favoring the political involvement of religion. When we do this, we confirm that traditionalists who support political activity are even more likely to favor accommodationist public policy than traditionalists who do not (data not shown).

In this paper we have shown that in 2004 Americans had generally positive attitudes about "religion in the public square," but that there were also numerous dissenters. Although these divisions appeared to fall into meaningful patterns along the lines dividing the historic traditions, we discovered that restructuring variables such as religious orthodoxy, traditional religious practice, and attitudes toward religious change—encapsulated in our traditionalism-modernism index—had a much more powerful impact on political religion.

And we found that favorable attitudes toward political religion, however produced, were a consistent factor in bolstering accommodationist policy preferences, whether this entailed posting the Ten Commandments in public buildings, providing for charitable choice or voucher plans, restricting the availability of abortion, or limiting advances in gay rights. Although religious traditionalism—especially traditional belief—is usually a powerful influence in the same direction, it is most effective in conjunction with pro-political religion sentiments. That many traditionalists have developed such a strong pro-activism ideology reflects the success of a whole generation of conservative leaders who have sought to reverse or mitigate the historic anti-political attitudes of many Evangelicals and devout Catholics. The end result, as we have seen, is stronger public support for accommodationist policies in the broadest sense. Such sentiment is by no means unchallenged, or even dominant, on contested issues. But the very prominence of these questions on the national agenda is a tribute to such revisionist efforts.

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Table 1.
Political Religion by Religious Groups
2004 Presidential Election (in percent)

	Percent of Eligible Electorate	**Religious Should Stand Up for Beliefs in Politics**	**President Should Have Strong Religious Beliefs**	**OK When Politicians Talk About Beliefs**	**Religious Groups Should Not Stay Out of Politics**	**Religion Important to My Political Decisions**	***Mean Score on Political Religion Scale (100=High)***
All Citizens	***100.0***	**75**	**68**	**63**	**52**	**38**	***56***
Evangelical							
Traditionalist	***10.7***	90	96	86	75	84	***79***
Centrist	***9.7***	82	90	76	59	48	***67***
Modernist	***3.3***	75	79	58	55	31	***58***
Nominal	***1.5***	67	53	52	41	10	***46***
Mainline							
Traditionalist	***4.5***	85	91	76	65	58	***69***
` Centrist	***5.5***	75	76	67	53	34	***59***
Modernist	***4.4***	74	53	60	47	13	***49***
Nominal	***2.0***	56	33	38	31	5	***37***
White Catholic							
Traditionalist	***4.2***	86	94	76	61	55	***69***
Centrist	***7.4***	74	75	60	47	25	***56***
Modernist	***3.8***	62	53	55	42	7	***46***
Nominal	***2.1***	62	29	34	31	8	***37***
Black Protestant	***9.3***	88	84	71	63	57	***67***
Hispanic							
Protestant	***2.6***	78	84	70	59	52	***65***
Catholic	***4.5***	75	72	60	59	40	***58***
Smaller Traditions							
Latter-day Saints	***1.4***	79	83	72	60	54	***69***
Other Christians	***1.3***	48	53	66	21	45	***54***
Jewish	***1.9***	63	25	33	43	33	***42***
Non-Christians	***2.6***	60	45	39	39	31	***45***
Unaffiliated							
Believers	***4.8***	72	51	58	47	28	***51***
Seculars	***9.0***	57	25	45	32	8	***36***
Atheist/agnostic	***3.5***	58	9	29	26	9	***30***

Source: Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, 2004. University of Akron/Pew Forum On Religion and Public Life. Pre-election sample (N=4000).

Table 2
Factors Influencing Support for Political Religion
(standardized OLS regression coefficients)

	Tradition Only	*Beliefs Only*	*Political Factors Only*	*Demographic Factors Only*	*All Variables*
Evangelical	.311***				.099***
Mainline	.071***				.076**
Catholic	.040*				.075**
Black Protestant	.159***				.073***
Hispanic Protestant	.072***				.030
Hispanic Catholic	.035*				.009
Latter-day Saints	.062***				.017
Non-Christians	-.101***				.007
Nominal	-.156***				.034
All Seculars	-.300***				.007
Orthodoxy		.399***			.290***
Religious Behavior		.260***			.244***
Favor Tradition		.096***			.082***
Conservative			.304***		.109***
Republican			.193***		.106***
Education level				-.061***	-.009
Income				-.058***	.006
Female				.067***	-.007
Marital status				.108***	.023
Age				-.048**	-.085***
Border State				.133***	.031*
South				.149***	.034*
Midwest				.102***	.045**
Adjusted R squared	.295	.424	.187	.051	.513

Source: Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, 2004. University of Akron/Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life Pre-election Survey (N=4000).

*p<.05;**p<.01;***p<.001

Table 3
Support for Accommodation of Religion by Religious Groups (in percent)

	Percent of Eligible Electorate	*Favor Posting Ten Command-ments*	*Favor Charitable Choice*	*Favor School Vouchers*	*High on Pro-Life Scale*	*Low on Gay Rights Scale*
All Citizens	**100.0**	**66**	**50**	**40**	**35**	**54**
Evangelical						
Traditionalist	10.7	93	62	51	68	89
Centrist	9.7	83	59	43	46	69
Modernist	3.3	73	52	39	35	61
Nominal	1.5	60	42	17	9	37
Mainline						
Traditionalist	4.5	75	55	37	37	70
Centrist	5.5	74	49	28	22	46
Modernist	4.4	62	35	27	13	35
Nominal	2.0	45	32	19	11	30
White Catholic						
Traditionalist	4.2	82	62	52	65	71
Centrist	7.4	72	49	48	31	49
Modernist	3.8	55	45	30	16	31
Nominal	2.1	47	30	28	10	19
Black Protestant	4.5	67	62	40	46	73
Hispanic						
Protestant	2.6	70	63	54	49	71
Catholic	4.5	55	59	58	33	54
Smaller Traditions						
Latter-day Saints	1.4	75	41	40	56	76
Other Christians	1.3	43	46	31	55	72
Non-Judeo-Christian	2.6	40	39	35	8	31
Jewish	1.9	35	38	43	9	17
Unaffiliated						
"Believers"	4.8	62	51	44	38	48
Seculars	9.0	43	34	29	13	27
Atheist/agnostic	3.5	28	17	22	6	14

Source: Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, 2004. University of Akron/Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life (N=4000).

Table 4
Factors Influencing Support for Accommodation of Religion in Public Policy
(standardized OLS regression coefficients)

	Favor Posting Ten Commandments	*Favor Charitable Choice*	*Favor School Vouchers*	*Favor Pro-Life Policy*	*Oppose Gay Rights Policy*
Evangelical	.032	-.029	-.061	-.040	-.050
Mainline	.040	-.024	-.092**	-.111***	-.082***
Catholic	.086***	.005	.026	-.018	-.084***
Black Protestant	.022	.040	-.046	-.028	.035
Hispanic Protestant	.015	-.049*	-.008	-.034	-.010
Hispanic Catholic	.011	.007	.086***	.002	.006
Latter-day Saints	.016	-.038	-.023	-.001	.005
Non-Christians	.034	-.041	.023	-.071***	-.035
Nominal	.035	-.009	-.044	-.005	-.000
All Seculars	.007	-.076*	-.036	-.008	-.053
Orthodoxy	.250***	.053	.011	.254***	.238***
Religious Behavior	-.021	.039	.089**	.132***	.075**
Favor Tradition	.060***	.027	.000	.053**	.099**
Political Religion	.198***	.206***	.168***	.171***	.108***
Conservative	.121***	.078***	.162***	.126	.138***
Republican	.097***	.004	.089***	-.079	-.080***
Education	-.148***	-.076***	-.055*	-.101***	-.121***
Income	-.005	-.089***	-.052*	-.072***	-.057**
Age	-.008	-.161***	-.103***	-.010	-.010
Female	-.007	-.011	-.040*	-.052***	-.090***
Married	.056**	-.004	-.016	.022	.055**
Border State	.038*	.009	-.034	.018	.049**
Deep South	.045**	.015	-.024	-.018	.040*
Midwest	.040*	.010	-.025	.021	.019
Adjusted R squared=	***.379***	***.171***	***.158***	***.417***	***.411***

Source: Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, 2004. University of Akron/Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life Pre-election Survey (N=4000).

*p<.05;**p<.01;***p<.001.