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A HOUSE DIVIDED? WHAT SOCIAL SCIENCE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THE CULTURE WAR

David E. Campbell*

America, the punditocracy has declared, is at war with itself. Intense political polarization—rooted in deep religious differences—has brought us a culture war, whose troops are recruited from the red and blue states. Upon digging deeper into data on Americans' political attitudes, however, social scientists are more equivocal. Perhaps, some have suggested, we hear only “rumors of wars.”¹ This debate over whether America is engaged in a culture war is a strange one, if only because the term itself is odd. It is a metaphor and, as such, is open to interpretation—even more so than most terms employed in social science. Whether we are in the midst of a culture war depends entirely on what one means by the term. Most often, the term is simply used to describe the fact that American politics is polarized—a proposition, we shall see, that is also a matter of interpretation. However, when we strip away the hyperbole and return to what the term was originally meant to convey, it describes a tremendously significant development in American religion, society, and politics. This is a case where the term itself has served as a distraction from the important insight it was meant to communicate.

I. POLARIZATION? YES AND NO

The term “culture war” was first popularized when Pat Buchanan used it in his primetime address to the 1992 Republican National Convention.² Buchanan, who had been a thorn in the side of incumbent George H. W. Bush during the primaries, delivered a fiery speech in which he stoked the Republican delegates with his inimitable blend of economic populism and social conservatism.³ In the speech, he declared that

[T]his election is about much more than who gets what. It is about who we are. It is about what we believe. It is about what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself.⁴

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¹ Mark 13:7; see Geoffrey C. Layman & John C. Green, *Wars and Rumors of Wars: The Contexts of Cultural Conflict in American Political Behavior*, 36 BRIT. J. POL. SCI. 61 (2006) (referencing “rumors of wars”).

² Patrick J. Buchanan, 1992 Republican National Convention Speech (Aug. 17, 1992), available at <http://www.buchanan.org/pa-92-0817-rnc.html> (last visited June 26, 2006).

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

The declaration of a religious and cultural war is evocative, as the martial imagery suggests two sharply opposed camps of opinion.

In a very important sense, Buchanan was wrong. And, likewise, so are the many pundits who also use the term “culture war” to mean intense polarization. While there is admittedly some debate over the degree to which Americans are polarized,⁵ the fairest reading of the evidence suggests that, across the issue spectrum, Americans are not as far apart as the pundits would have you believe. To be polarized in the sense of two opposing extremes requires a “bimodal” distribution of opinion—that is, when Americans’ attitudes are arrayed along a continuum, we should expect to see two peaks on the left and right respectively, with little convergence in the middle.⁶ By this standard, Americans are clearly not polarized. The recent book *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* by Stanford political scientist Morris Fiorina demonstrates convincingly that even on the most hot-button issues, American public opinion gravitates toward the moderate middle.⁷ Take the paradigmatic issue of abortion. In Fiorina’s words:

[T]he evidence is clear that the broad American public is not polarized on the specifics of the abortion issue. They believe that abortion should be legal but that it is reasonable to regulate it in various ways. They are “pro-choice, but.”⁸

Furthermore, there has been remarkably little change in the median position on abortion over the last twenty years.⁹ Similarly, Fiorina finds that on any of the most

⁵ See the following articles in the electronic journal *The Forum*: Alan Abramowitz & Kyle Saunders, *Why Can't We All Just Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized America*, 3 THE FORUM, July 2005, <http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol3/iss2>; Wayne Baker, *Social Science in the Public Interest: To What Extent Did the Media Cover “Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America”?*, 3 THE FORUM, July 2005, <http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol3/iss2>; N.J. Demerath, *The Battle over a U.S. Culture War: A Note on Inflated Rhetoric Versus Inflamed Politics*, 3 THE FORUM, July 2005, <http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol3/iss2>; John H. Evans & Lisa M. Nunn, *The Deeper “Culture Wars” Questions*, 3 THE FORUM, July 2005, <http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol3/iss2>; Philip A. Klinkner & Ann Hapanowicz, *Red and Blue Déjà vu: Measuring Political Polarization in the 2004 Election*, 3 THE FORUM, July 2005, <http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol3/iss2>; Cindy Simon Rosenthal, *Local Politics: A Different Front in the Culture War?*, 3 THE FORUM, <http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol3/iss2>.

⁶ See MORRIS P. FIORINA ET AL., *CULTURE WAR? THE MYTH OF A POLARIZED AMERICA* 13–14 (2d ed. 2006).

⁷ See *id.* at 8–9.

⁸ *Id.* at 92. Other social scientists question whether mainstream Americans (that is, not political activists) are polarized. See WAYNE BAKER, *AMERICA’S CRISIS OF VALUES* (2005); Paul DiMaggio et al., *Have Americans’ Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?*, 102 AM. J. SOC. 690 (1996); John H. Evans, *Have Americans’ Attitudes Become More Polarized?—An Update*, 84 SOC. SCI. Q. 71 (2003).

⁹ FIORINA ET AL., *supra* note 6, at 81–83.

contentious issues facing the public, Americans' opinions cluster in the moderate middle.¹⁰

Given the frequency with which the term "polarization" is used to describe American politics, it probably seems counterintuitive to claim that Americans are not really polarized after all. While Fiorina's evidence is convincing that Americans are not polarized in one sense, this does not rule out polarization in quite another. In physics, polarization refers to elementary particles spinning in alignment.¹¹ In politics, we might think of individual voters as the most elementary particle and so another definition of political polarization is that, within parties, individuals "spin" in the same direction. In the succinct phrasing of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to polarize means "to give unity of direction to."¹² By this definition, Americans have clearly undergone a dramatic polarization over the last generation. Within both Republican and Democratic ranks, there is unequivocally increasing unity and direction.

Notably, today's partisans are more unified ideologically now than at any point since the advent of modern public opinion surveys. This trend might also be described as ideological consolidation, or perhaps a form of sorting (the term most often applied to it). Indeed, scholars of American politics have long separated ideology and partisanship—something that would be largely unnecessary in many other nations—precisely because they have historically been distinct in the American context. Owing to a winner-takes-all election system, the United States has only two electorally viable parties, both of which are pulled toward adopting centrist positions. While the Republicans have always been a little to the right and the Democrats a little to the left, each party's tent has historically been big enough to have room for liberals and conservatives alike.

In recent years, however, American parties have become increasingly ideological. Whereas there was once a sizable liberal wing within the Republican party (personified by Nelson Rockefeller) and a conservative one within the Democrats (think Scoop Jackson), today conservative Democrats are a highly endangered species, while liberal Republicans are pretty well extinct. Polarization—in the sense of sorting—is most pronounced among party leaders and candidates but is nonetheless observed among the masses as well. Since the 1970s, there has been an increasingly tighter connection between ideology and partisanship.

Partisan cohesiveness is not just limited to ideology, as partisanship also shapes the way voters see the world. Political scientists have long conceived of partisanship as a perceptual screen, but the new cohesiveness has only increased the degree to which one's party allegiance filters Americans' perceptions of many issues. The economy is one example, the war in Iraq another. Gary Jacobson, of the University of California-San Diego, reports that in the last quarter of 2004, Republican support for the

¹⁰ See *id.* at 9.

¹¹ 12 OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY 14 (2d ed. 1989).

¹² *Id.* at 15.

Iraq War was sixty-three percentage points higher than among Democrats.¹³ In the case of the Iraq War, a comparison with Vietnam is telling. Even though, like the conflict in Iraq, the Vietnam War became extremely divisive, at no point were attitudes toward the war so starkly defined by partisanship.¹⁴ Republicans and Democrats never differed in their support for the Vietnam War by more than five percentage points.¹⁵

Partisanship not only shapes what Americans believe; it also affects what they buy. In one of the most fascinating and understudied developments in American society, partisanship has also become increasingly related to consumer habits—a point on which the pundits are ahead of the scholars, as political science has generally ignored the broader ways in which partisanship shapes lifestyle choices.¹⁶

II. THE RESTRUCTURING OF AMERICAN RELIGION

Of all the traits by which Republicans and Democrats have sorted themselves, the one that most directly pertains to the culture war question is religion. The nature of this sorting brings us back to Pat Buchanan. While Buchanan was wrong to claim that Americans were arrayed in two camps on a cultural battlefield, his very presence at the podium of the 1992 Republican convention nonetheless embodies the original meaning of “culture war.”¹⁷ The term was coined by sociologist James Davison Hunter to describe what is perhaps the most significant trend within American religion, which in turn has come to have implications for the nation’s politics.¹⁸ The gist of his argument is that Americans increasingly coalesce around religious *traditionalism* rather than religious *tradition* (or denomination).¹⁹ The clearest shift has been among Catholics and Protestants, two groups that once differed sharply in many ways. Now, traditional Catholics often have more in common with traditional Protestants (and those

¹³ Gary C. Jacobson, *The Iraq War and the 2004 Presidential Election*, Paper Delivered at Ohio State University Conference: The Wartime Election of 2004 (Jan. 12–15, 2006), available at http://psweb.sbs.ohio-state.edu/wartime_election/papers/jacobson_war.pdf, at 6.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 7–8.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 8. A more complete discussion can be found in GARY C. JACOBSON, *A DIVIDER, NOT A UNITER: GEORGE W. BUSH AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC* (2007).

¹⁶ For one pundit’s discussion of the lifestyle differences between Republicans and Democrats, see David Brooks, *One Nation, Slightly Divisible*, ATLANTIC MONTHLY, Dec. 2001, at 53. An exception to the scholarly inattention to this issue is a recent paper by political scientists Melissa Marschall and Wendy Rahn which shows the partisan complexion of consumer choices. See Melissa Marschall & Wendy M. Rahn, *Birds of a Political Feather: Ideology, Partisanship, and Geographic Sorting in the American Electorate*, Paper Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association (Apr. 21, 2006), available at <http://www.polisci.umn.edu/faculty/wrahn/Marschall-Rahn-Midwest-2006-sketch.pdf>.

¹⁷ See *supra* Part I.

¹⁸ JAMES DAVISON HUNTER, *CULTURE WARS? THE STRUGGLE TO DEFINE AMERICA* 42 (1991).

¹⁹ See *id.* at 42–47.

of other faiths, including Jews) than with liberal Catholics.²⁰ Indeed, traditionalists of all denominational stripes find common cause, while modernists also cluster together.²¹

Further buttressing Hunter's argument is that he was not the only sociologist to make this observation, as a few years before *Culture War* was published Robert Wuthnow had written a book titled *The Restructuring of American Religion*, which advances essentially the same thesis.²² Unfortunately for Wuthnow's citation count, "restructuring" is not as catchy as "culture war." It is hard to imagine a columnist making a polemical point or Buchanan rallying the Republican faithful by referring to the *restructuring* underway in American religion. For better or worse, it was Hunter's term that entered the public lexicon.

For the sake of analytic clarity, however, restructuring is most apt, as it better describes the changes that have taken place in American religion. Old denominational lines have eroded in favor of a new affinity among people who consider themselves religious traditionalists, regardless of their affiliation.²³ Religious traditionalism even unites Americans across boundaries which once rigidly defined American religion: Catholicism-Protestantism-Judaism-Mormonism, etc.²⁴ Nowhere are these new allegiances clearer than in the way Americans vote. It was once the case that religious tradition was a good indicator of voters' partisanship.²⁵ Catholics were Democrats, and Protestants, especially mainline Protestants, were Republicans.²⁶ Today, however, traditional Catholics and traditional Protestants alike identify as Republicans.²⁷ Whereas the parties were once divided by denomination, now there is a *devotional divide*.²⁸

All of which brings us back to Pat Buchanan, whom I above described as the embodiment of how American religion has been restructured (i.e., "the culture war").²⁹ Buchanan is a Catholic, yet found support among the evangelical Christians who increasingly constitute the base of the Republican Party.³⁰ Looking over the long haul of American history, it is difficult to overstate how anomalous it was to have a Catholic rallying evangelicals by declaring a "religious war." In the past, it would have been the Protestants rallying to fend off the Catholics.

²⁰ See *id.* at 35.

²¹ See *id.* at 39.

²² ROBERT WUTHNOW, *THE RESTRUCTURING OF AMERICAN RELIGION: SOCIETY AND FAITH SINCE WORLD WAR II* (1988).

²³ ANDREW KOHUT ET AL., *THE DIMINISHING DIVIDE: RELIGION'S CHANGING ROLE IN AMERICAN POLITICS* 123-24 (2000).

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.* at 74-76.

²⁶ *Id.* at 76.

²⁷ *Id.* at 77.

²⁸ See generally *id.*

²⁹ See *supra* note 17 and accompanying text.

³⁰ GEOFFREY C. LAYMAN, *THE GREAT DIVIDE: RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CONFLICT IN AMERICAN PARTY POLITICS* 139 (2001).

III. THE DEVOTIONAL DIVIDE

One piece of evidence favoring the “devotional divide” separating the parties is widely reported, namely that there is a church attendance gap in presidential voting, precisely as predicted by the restructuring hypothesis. Of those Americans who report never attending religious services or doing so a few times a year, forty-seven percent voted for Bush in 2004, while of those who attend once a week or more, sixty-seven percent cast their ballots for Bush.³¹ This devotional divide opened up in the early 1980s, and has widened since. Furthermore, it is especially apparent among young people, suggesting that it will persist into the future.³² I stress that these data are only generalizations, as there are many religiously devout people who vote Democratic. This is especially true in the African-American community, where a greater frequency of religious service attendance actually predicts a higher level of support for Democratic candidates.³³

Frequency of attendance at religious services is often used as a gauge of religious traditionalism because it is easy to measure. However, it is at best a blunt test of the restructuring/culture war hypothesis, which actually states that the fault line dividing people is their moral worldview—whether they adhere to an “external, definable, and transcendent authority.”³⁴ In Hunter’s words:

Such objective and transcendent authority defines, at least in the abstract, a consistent, unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and identity, both personal and collective. It tells us what is good, what is true, how we should live, and who we are. It is an authority that is sufficient for all time.³⁵

On the other hand, people with a progressive/modernist worldview “resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life.”³⁶ Clearly, frequency of attendance at religious services is a loose proxy, at best, for this distinction. What is needed instead is a measure of moral traditionalism.

³¹ These numbers are for non-African Americans. African Americans are discussed below. Voting data are from the American National Election Study. American National Election Study, <http://www.umich.edu/~nes/study pages/2004prepost/2004prepost.htm> (last visited Aug. 27, 2006) [hereinafter Election Study].

³² See David E. Campbell, *The Young and the Realigning: A Test of the Socialization Theory of Realignment*, 66 PUB. OPINION Q. 209 (2002).

³³ Election Study, *supra* note 31.

³⁴ HUNTER, *supra* note 18, at 44 (emphasis omitted).

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.* at 44–45 (emphasis omitted).

Fortunately, the American National Election Study includes a detailed index of moral traditionalism, which consists of the following four questions.³⁷ Respondents were asked the extent to which they agree with each of the following four statements:

- (1) The world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes.
- (2) The newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society.
- (3) We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards, even if they are very different from our own.
- (4) This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family ties.³⁸

By reversing the polarity of (1) and (3), we can construct an index by simply adding up someone's responses to these questions, such that a higher number means a more traditionalist outlook.³⁹ The restructuring hypothesis would lead us to predict that more traditionalism corresponds with a higher probability of voting for Bush. Not only is this the case, the results are even more striking than when we examine attendance at religious services. Only twenty-four percent of people⁴⁰ who score in the bottom quartile of the traditionalism index voted for Bush in 2004, compared to fifty-five percent in the second quartile, seventy-three percent in the third, and eighty-four percent in the top quartile.⁴¹ When we compare level of traditionalism versus religious tradition, it is clearly traditionalism that makes the difference. Among Protestants, in fact, denomination makes no difference once traditionalism is taken into account. When we look at both evangelical and mainline Protestants, eighty-nine percent who scored in the highest quartile of moral traditionalism voted for Bush.⁴²

There is no better illustration of the restructuring hypothesis than the contrast between John F. Kennedy and John Kerry. The similarities between the two are a social scientist's dream, as it almost seems as though the Democratic Party nominated Kerry to run a controlled experiment to compare the changing perceptions of Catholic presidential candidates between 1960 and 2004. Both Kennedy and Kerry were decorated military veterans, Democratic senators, and from the state of

³⁷ NES 2004 Post Election Questionnaire, <http://www.umich.edu/~nes/studypages/2004prepost/2004prepost.htm> (follow "Post-election" hyperlink) (last visited Aug. 27, 2006).

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ More statistically sophisticated methods, like factor analysis, produce substantively identical results. This data is available from the American National Election Study. Election Study, *supra* note 31.

⁴⁰ Again, these results are for non-African Americans.

⁴¹ Election Study, *supra* note 31.

⁴² *Id.*

Massachusetts.⁴³ They even have the same initials. Most importantly, both were Catholic.⁴⁴ In 1960, Kennedy took an overwhelming share of the Catholic vote—eighty-two percent.⁴⁵ In 2004, however, Kerry split the Catholic vote with Bush and lost handily among morally-traditionalist Catholics, garnering only thirty percent of their votes.⁴⁶

In comparing Kennedy's experience in 1960 and Kerry's in 2004, the ironies abound. While Kennedy had to worry about appearing "too Catholic," Kerry was often criticized by other Catholics for not being Catholic enough.⁴⁷ Kennedy ran in the shadow of Al Smith's 1928 bid for the presidency.⁴⁸ Smith, the first Catholic ever nominated by a major party, suffered a landslide defeat in the face of strident anti-Catholicism.⁴⁹ With Smith's disastrous campaign in living memory, Kennedy had to convince Protestants, evangelicals especially, that a Catholic could be trusted with the presidency.⁵⁰ Seminal in his campaign was a speech he delivered in Texas to Baptist ministers in which he famously declared:

I do not speak for my church on public matters—and the church does not speak for me.

Whatever issue may come before me as President, if I should be elected—on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling, or any other subject—I will make my decision in accordance with . . . what my conscience tells me to be in the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressure or dictate.⁵¹

Rather than Baptist ministers, Kerry had to worry about Catholic bishops, as he faced criticism from within Catholic ranks.⁵² During 2004, some—but, importantly, far from

⁴³ J. Matthew Wilson, *The Changing Catholic Voter: Comparing Responses to John Kennedy in 1960 and John Kerry in 2004*, in *A MATTER OF FAITH? RELIGION IN THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION* (David E. Campbell ed., forthcoming 2007), available at http://americandemocracy.nd.edu/conferences/matter_of_faith/documents/Wilson.pdf [hereinafter *MATTER OF FAITH*].

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 14.

⁴⁶ Data from the 1960 and 2004 American National Election Studies, respectively. Election Study, *supra* note 31.

⁴⁷ Wilson, *supra* note 43, at 3, 5–6.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 3.

⁴⁹ Note that Smith's Catholicism is not the only reason he lost the election and, given the uphill battle of any Democratic candidate at the time, may not have even been critical. Nonetheless, he did face anti-Catholicism on the campaign trail, which is the point here.

⁵⁰ Wilson, *supra* note 43, at 3.

⁵¹ John F. Kennedy, Remarks on Church and State, Delivered to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association (Sept. 12, 1960), in *A WALL OF SEPARATION? DEBATING THE PUBLIC ROLE OF RELIGION* 140, 142 (Mary C. Segers & Ted G. Jelen eds., 1998).

⁵² Wilson, *supra* note 43, at 5.

all—bishops pointedly announced that Catholic politicians who support abortion (like a certain presidential candidate) could not receive communion in their dioceses.⁵³ Again, the traditionalist-modernist divide appears, even among Catholic clergy. In sharp contrast, it would have been absolutely inconceivable for the bishops to publicly take Kennedy to task, or to show any disagreement among themselves on some aspect of his candidacy.⁵⁴

IV. RELIGION'S (RE)EMERGENCE IN AMERICAN POLITICS

How did we get to the point where traditionalism has the political relevance that it now does? In his exhaustive account of the growing cultural divide, Geoffrey Layman traces the beginning of this religious realignment to 1972, when George McGovern assembled a stridently secular group of activists to win the Democratic nomination.⁵⁵ Ironically, McGovern himself was the son of a minister and had attended a seminary after graduating from a religious university, Dakota Wesleyan.⁵⁶ But his anti-war message proved especially popular among a highly secularized, liberal group of political activists who took advantage of the new openness in the nomination process to make McGovern the Democratic standard bearer.⁵⁷ He went down in flames in the general election.

Then came 1976, when that same nomination process led the Democrats to select a Baptist Sunday-school teacher from Plains, Georgia.⁵⁸ Jimmy Carter holds the distinction of being the first presidential candidate to publicly declare himself to be a born-again Christian, thus making salient a new political category.⁵⁹ Prior to Jimmy Carter, many Americans thought of themselves as born-again Christians, but few would have thought that to be a politically-relevant designation. Carter embraced the appellation to underscore his personal rectitude. By introducing the term "born again" to American political discourse, Carter was at the vanguard of a movement that would come to prominence over the next three decades. In yet another irony, the political emergence of born-again Christians, or evangelicals, came to benefit not Carter's own Democratic party, but the Republicans instead.⁶⁰

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 6.

⁵⁵ LAYMAN, *supra* note 30, at 41. Note that this book is an excellent overall treatment of religion's rising significance in the American party system. For another noteworthy discussion, see DAVID C. LEEGE ET AL., *THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES: SOCIAL CHANGE AND VOTER MOBILIZATION STRATEGIES IN THE POST-NEW DEAL PERIOD* (2002).

⁵⁶ E.J. DIONNE JR., *WHY AMERICANS HATE POLITICS* 119 (1991).

⁵⁷ LAYMAN, *supra* note 30, at 42–43.

⁵⁸ DIONNE, *supra* note 56, at 125.

⁵⁹ *Id.* at 224–27.

⁶⁰ For a thoughtful discussion of these developments, see DIONNE, *supra* note 56.

In the late 1970s, a minority Republican Party needed to broaden its coalition, and saw an opportunity to attract morally traditionalist Protestants, specifically white evangelicals and their more conservative cousins the fundamentalist, with a platform of social conservatism.⁶¹ Assisting in the effort of winning evangelicals' hearts and, more importantly, votes were organizations like the Moral Majority. Founded by Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority was ostensibly a union of religious conservatives of all stripes, and was the organizational home of what scholars came to call the New Christian Right.⁶² The Moral Majority collapsed, but in its wake rose the Christian Coalition, which was built on the organizational infrastructure of televangelist Pat Robertson's run for the Republican presidential nomination.⁶³ For a time during the 1990s, the Christian Coalition's leader, Ralph Reed, had a seemingly ubiquitous presence in the news media. Today, the Christian Coalition still exists, but is a shadow of its former self. It waned, but the political influence of evangelicals has nonetheless waxed. Rather than an organization at the periphery of the party, the Christian Right (no longer new) has been incorporated into the Republican Party apparatus in a way similar to the Democratic Party's embrace of labor unions.

No American politician has more successfully capitalized on the rising influence of evangelicals within the GOP than George W. Bush.⁶⁴ Even though he was raised as a "high Church" Protestant, Bush adopted an evangelical style of worship while living in Texas.⁶⁵ His story is one of personal redemption, as he turned away from the bottle and toward the Bible.⁶⁶ George Bush the younger's familiarity with evangelicalism was a boon for his father during Bush the elder's 1988 run for the presidency, and later for his own political career. George W. Bush was his father's liaison with evangelical groups during the 1988 campaign, making connections that were undoubtedly helpful when he ran for governor of Texas and then for president.⁶⁷

Since entering politics, Bush has demonstrated his evangelical bona fides subtly but unmistakably. Most famously, when asked to name his favorite philosopher in a debate with other contenders for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000, he forthrightly declared, "Christ, because he changed my heart."⁶⁸ It does not really

⁶¹ *Id.* at 230–32.

⁶² The New Christian Right included other organizations too, notably The Religious Roundtable. *See* CLYDE WILCOX & CARIN LARSON, ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS? THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT IN AMERICAN POLITICS 41 (3d ed. 2006).

⁶³ *Id.* at 46–47.

⁶⁴ An excellent exposition of George W. Bush's religious background can be found in *Frontline: The Jesus Factor* (PBS television broadcast 2004), available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jesus/view/> (last visited Aug. 22, 2006).

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.*

matter whether this was a rehearsed or spontaneous response; it was exactly what evangelical voters wanted to hear.⁶⁹

While this incident is often cited as an example of how Bush expresses his faith, it is really more the exception than the rule. For while the party has welcomed an influx of evangelicals, its public face has emphasized broad-based appeals to “values” and similar terms that cover multiple religious traditions. Bush is an exemplar of this approach, as he actually speaks rarely of his religion in personal terms. As a result, Bush is able to draw support from moral traditionalists outside of the evangelical community. Indeed, the political genius of Bush and the contemporary Republican party more broadly is that the support they find among evangelicals has also extended to moral traditionalists of all stripes, including Catholics. Indeed, the shift of traditionalist Catholic voters to the Republican Party is one of the most significant political realignments of the last generation.

Some of the Catholic shift to the GOP can be explained by their rising socioeconomic status.⁷⁰ But to a much greater extent, it has been the result of a split in American Catholicism that resembles the long-standing schisms within Protestantism between traditionalists and modernists, conservatives and liberals. This divide—the restructuring spoken of by Wuthnow—was enabled by the successful assimilation of Catholics into mainstream American society.⁷¹ The Catholics who came to America during the immigration waves of the 1800s and early 1900s found themselves in tension with a Protestant society that often exhibited anti-Catholic prejudices.⁷² Consequently, they developed a strong sense of group identity, reinforced by living in ethnic Catholic neighborhoods and attending Catholic schools.⁷³ But as Catholics lived out the American dream, they moved out of those neighborhoods and into the suburbs.⁷⁴ The public schools became secularized, as school prayer and Bible reading were deemed unconstitutional, and so Catholics were less likely to see them as Protestant bastions.⁷⁵ Enrollment in Catholic schools dropped, as more Catholics sent their children to public school.⁷⁶

The year 1960 saw perhaps the last gasp of ethnic solidarity among American Catholics, as Kennedy’s election marked their full acceptance into mainstream American

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ WUTHNOW, *supra* note 22, at 86.

⁷¹ *See id.*

⁷² *Id.* at 73–74.

⁷³ GERALD H. GAMM, *URBAN EXODUS: WHY THE JEWS LEFT BOSTON AND THE CATHOLICS STAYED* (1999).

⁷⁴ JAY P. DOLAN, *IN SEARCH OF AN AMERICAN CATHOLICISM: A HISTORY OF RELIGION AND CULTURE IN TENSION 184–86* (2002).

⁷⁵ NOAH FELDMAN, *DIVIDED BY GOD: AMERICAN’S CHURCH-STATE PROBLEM AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO ABOUT IT* 57–110 (2005).

⁷⁶ PATRICK W. CAREY, *CATHOLICS IN AMERICA: A HISTORY* 120 (2004).

society. That acceptance was only underscored when Kennedy was assassinated, as he was not mourned as the *Catholic* president but simply as the *American* president.

With assimilation, Catholics no longer defined themselves in opposition to the Protestant majority. And, fittingly perhaps, Catholics then began to split along a modernist-traditionalist divide, just like the Protestants. The divide came in the wake of the Second Vatican Council's liberalizing reforms, and was accelerated upon the publication of the 1968 papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which reaffirmed the Vatican's ban on birth control.⁷⁷ No longer are parishes determined by ethnicity and geography; increasingly, Catholics select a parish in which they feel comfortable, and many do so by choosing one with the level of traditionalism they want. A 2002 survey of American Catholics conducted by Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate found that seventy-two percent said that "the traditional or conservative nature of the church" was an important or very important reason for choosing their parish.⁷⁸

Catholics are one example of the "traditionalist coalition" under the GOP tent. Mormons are another. Mormons, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are a group that is as morally traditionalist as they come, but whose theology and widespread proselytizing engender hostility from many evangelical leaders (including the label of a "cult"). Nevertheless, Mormons are overwhelmingly Republican, and extremely supportive of Bush, the evangelical president.⁷⁹ According to the Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, ninety-seven percent of Mormons voted for Bush in 2004.⁸⁰

The public perception of the GOP as the party of religious traditionalism was underscored in 2000, when the Democrats specifically attempted to counter an emphasis on moral values by nominating Joe Lieberman, an orthodox Jew. Why Lieberman? Not to shore up the Jewish vote, which was safely in Democratic hands. Instead, Lieberman was thought to speak to moral traditionalists of all religious backgrounds. He was comfortable with religious language, and, of particular significance in 2000, had been one of the first Democrats to lambaste President Bill Clinton for his

⁷⁷ *Humanae Vitae: Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Regulation of Birth*, July 25, 1968, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/ (last visited Aug. 27, 2006).

⁷⁸ Data provided to author by Georgetown University Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, <http://cara.georgetown.edu/> (last visited Aug. 27, 2006).

⁷⁹ For a general discussion of Mormon political behavior, see David E. Campbell & J. Quin Monson, *Dry Kindling: A Political Profile of American Mormons*, in FROM PEWS TO POLLING PLACES: FAITH AND POLITICS IN THE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS MOSAIC (J. Matthew Wilson ed., forthcoming 2006).

⁸⁰ For data on Mormons in the 2004 presidential election, see John C. Green et al., *How the Faithful Voted: Religious Communities and the Presidential Vote*, in MATTER OF FAITH, *supra* note 43, available at http://americandemocracy.nd.edu/conferences/matter_of_faith/documents/Green.pdf. Note that the small sample size for Mormons makes the estimate of their vote for Bush imprecise.

relationship with Monica Lewinsky. On the stump, Lieberman spoke often of his faith. Like Bush, he used inclusive phrasing meant to attract a wide audience. In the end, his efforts made little difference, as Bush handily won among moral traditionalists. For analytical purposes, however, the most interesting aspect of Lieberman's vice-presidential candidacy in 2000 was the fact that Democratic strategists felt that an orthodox Jew could potentially rally the support of moral traditionalists across the religious spectrum, Protestants and Catholics alike.

There is an important caveat to the conclusion that moral traditionalism shapes the American political landscape. It matters only to the extent that the parties and their candidates present distinctive stands on moral issues, and the issues are themselves salient to voters. In the words of Geoffrey Layman and John Green, in the most thorough analysis of the "culture war" thesis to date:

When parties and their candidates emphasize moral issues and take distinct stands on them, the orthodox-progressive divide can become politically important. But when moral issues are placed on the back burner of a campaign or partisan moral differences are blurred, the orthodox-progressive divide should be much less relevant to political behaviour.⁸¹

The key, then, to whether moral traditionalism matters in a particular election is the extent to which moral issues factor into the campaign, and whether the candidates in the race take divergent positions on those issues.

V. 2004: THE MORAL VALUES ELECTION?

All of which brings us to the election of 2004, when "moral values" took center stage and, many observers have argued, the conditions Layman and Green describe were present. In the wake of the election, many pundits concluded that the contest was decided in Bush's favor because of his emphasis on moral values—the option chosen by a plurality of voters (twenty-two percent) in exit polls as the most important criterion affecting their vote.⁸² Of those who selected moral values, an overwhelming percentage voted for Bush.⁸³ Further strengthening the interpretation that the 2004 election was settled on the basis of moral values was the prominence of gay marriage as an issue. In 2004, thirteen states held referenda on banning gay marriage, eleven of which were held simultaneously with the presidential election in November.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Layman & Green, *supra* note 1, at 83.

⁸² 2004 Presidential Election Polls, CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/US/P/00/epolls.0.html> (last visited Sept. 4, 2006).

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ Paul Freedman, *The Gay Marriage Myth: Terrorism, Not Values, Drove Bush's*

Perhaps most critically, one of the states that held gay marriage referenda was the battleground state of Ohio, the linchpin of the entire election.⁸⁵ Many observers concluded that Bush benefitted from these ballot initiatives in what we might call a reverse coat-tail effect: religious conservatives were mobilized to come to the polls to vote in favor of banning gay marriage and, while there, to cast a ballot for Bush as well.⁸⁶ In support of this explanation was considerable evidence of intensive church-based voter mobilization in states with a gay marriage ban on the ballot, Ohio especially.⁸⁷

Notwithstanding this evidence, the moral values interpretation of the 2004 election has been hotly contested. In the immediate wake of the election, critics quickly noted the hazards in over-interpreting a flawed exit poll question, while scholars weighed in with evidence that the gay marriage issue was not so critical after all.⁸⁸ For example, few voters ranked gay marriage as a high priority issue.⁸⁹ The verdict on whether the 2004 election was decided by moral values is—yes and no. No, because numerous sources of data show that for *most* voters, 2004 was decided on the basis of security, the war in Iraq, and the economy. Yes, because while moral values—and gay marriage specifically—did not matter all that much to many, they mattered *a lot to a few*. But a critical few—evangelicals especially. After the 2000 election, Karl Rove publicly stated that the key to Bush's re-election lay in mobilizing "4 million" evangelicals who stayed home in 2000.⁹⁰ Scott Keeter, of the nonpartisan Pew Research Center, shows that it was evangelicals who gravitated toward moral values as an explanation for their support of Bush, and that by "moral values" they meant issues like abortion and gay marriage.⁹¹

The 2004 campaign saw considerable efforts to maximize mobilization among evangelicals specifically, and religious traditionalists more generally.⁹² For example,

Re-election, SLATE, Nov. 5, 2004, <http://www.slate.com/id/2109275/>.

⁸⁵ For a complete discussion of the controversy over the "moral values" exit poll question, see Scott Keeter, *Evangelicals and Moral Values in the Election of 2004*, in MATTER OF FAITH, *supra* note 43, available at http://americandemocracy.nd.edu/conferences/matter_of_faith/documents/EvangelicalsandMoralValuesin2004NotreDame.pdf.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 12.

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ Sunshine Hillygus, *Moral Issues in the 2004 Election*, in MATTER OF FAITH, *supra* note 43, available at http://americandemocracy.nd.edu/conferences/matter_of_faith/documents/Hillygus.pdf.

⁹⁰ Rove first made this observation publicly at an American Enterprise Institute sponsored event in December 2001. Karl Rove, White House Senior Advisor, *The Bush Presidency: Transition and Transformation: A Discussion with Karl Rove* (Dec. 11, 2004), available at <http://www.aei.org/research/tgp/events/eventID.14,projectID.12/transcript.asp>.

⁹¹ Keeter, *supra* note 85.

⁹² David E. Campbell & J. Quin Monson, *The Religion Card: Gay Marriage and the 2004 Presidential Election* (unpublished manuscript, on file with the *William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal*).

in some states Republicans used church directories and subscription lists for religious magazines to target their political mail.⁹³ A survey of direct mail sent to American households shows that religious conservatives were more likely than other voters to receive flyers that made mention of values-themed messages, and that the overwhelming share of that mail came from the Bush campaign and/or the Republican Party.⁹⁴ Furthermore, values advertising was more common in states with a gay marriage ban on the ballot, with, not surprisingly, marriage being a common topic within the flyers.⁹⁵ Note, however, that in their advertising, the Republicans were careful to accentuate the positive.⁹⁶ For example, the issue of gay marriage was framed in the context of Bush's support for traditional (i.e., heterosexual) marriage rather than opposition to marriage for homosexuals.⁹⁷

It appears that these efforts paid off. My colleague Quin Monson and I have found evidence that the Republicans successfully boosted the turnout for Bush among evangelicals in those states with a gay marriage ban on the ballot, even when accounting for many other factors spurring voters to the polls.⁹⁸ We also have suggestive evidence that Catholics were similarly mobilized for Bush in those same states.⁹⁹

CONCLUSION: SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED?

In sum, there is considerable evidence that American religion and politics have undergone a fundamental restructuring—the key insight of Hunter when he first coined the term “culture war.”¹⁰⁰ Religious *traditionalism* has become both a religious and a political dividing line, replacing the old demarcation of religious *tradition*. Normatively, is this a problem? While the recent resurgence of religion in American politics has generated a lot of discussion and hand-wringing, we should keep in mind that the *anomaly* was the postwar period when—with the notable exception of 1960—religion largely receded as a factor in electoral politics. Historically, religious divides have been the norm in American politics. A few examples make the point. In the early 1800s, Thomas Jefferson was accused of being an atheist, and of harboring plans to confiscate the Bible.¹⁰¹ The nascent party system of the 1800s also had a

⁹³ *Id.* See generally J. Quin Monson & Baxter Oliphant, *The Instrumental Use of Religion to Mobilize Religious Conservatives in the 2004 Election*, in MATTER OF FAITH, *supra* note 43, available at http://americandemocracy.nd.edu/conferences/matter_of_faith/documents/Monson.pdf.

⁹⁴ Campbell & Monson, *supra* note 92.

⁹⁵ *Id.*

⁹⁶ *Id.*

⁹⁷ *Id.*

⁹⁸ *Id.*

⁹⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰⁰ See generally HUNTER, *supra* note 18.

¹⁰¹ Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson, a Mammoth Cheese, and the “Wall of Separation Between Church and State”*, in RELIGION AND THE NEW REPUBLIC: FAITH IN THE

religious cast to it, as it reflected a divide between religious groups that can be characterized as “liturgical” or “pietistic.”¹⁰² The late 1800s and early 1900s saw William Jennings Bryan passionately link scriptural themes to economic policy.¹⁰³ The year 1928 saw a vitriolic campaign in which anti-Catholic invective was directed at Al Smith.¹⁰⁴ And, of course, the abolitionist and temperance movements both had religious roots.¹⁰⁵ Prior to the emergence of the New Christian Right, even the postwar period saw religion leave a deep imprint on the American political landscape, as the civil rights movement sprang from African-American churches.¹⁰⁶

American political history shows that religion has long propelled myriad political movements by providing them with an organizational infrastructure to advance their cause, while many political leaders have also successfully drawn on a reserve of powerful religious symbolism. William Jennings Bryan electrified the 1896 Democratic convention by linking what today seems a rather arcane issue, namely the coinage of silver, to the most evocative of all Christian symbols—the crucifixion of Jesus.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, abolitionists drew on the narrative of the biblical Israelites, held as slaves to the Egyptians but freed by God, to inspire the efforts to end slavery in America.¹⁰⁸

It is no coincidence that a nation that bans the establishment of religion has nonetheless experienced a politics in which religion has played such a prominent role. The prohibition of establishment coupled with the guarantee of free exercise has led to a robust religious environment in America. No one should therefore be surprised that citizens who make religion a meaningful part of their lives would, in turn, let their religion guide their politics.

Are we experiencing a culture war? The term is unfortunate, as it is unnecessarily hyperbolic. There is no war. Yet there has been a restructuring in American religion that, in turn, is reflected in contemporary voting patterns. However, this is a case where “there is not a new thing under the sun.”¹⁰⁹ Religion plays a role in the politics of the present, just as it has in the past, and as it almost certainly will in the future.

FOUNDING OF AMERICA 69 (James H. Hutson ed., 2000).

¹⁰² RICHARD JENSEN, *THE WINNING OF THE MIDWEST: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONFLICT, 1888–1896* (1971); PAUL KLEPPNER, *CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN ELECTORAL POLITICS, 1893–1928* (1987); PAUL KLEPPNER, *THE CROSS OF CULTURE: A SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF MIDWESTERN POLITICS, 1850–1900* (1970).

¹⁰³ JENSEN, *supra* note 102, at xiii.

¹⁰⁴ WILLIAM B. PRENDERGAST, *THE CATHOLIC VOTER IN AMERICAN POLITICS: THE PASSING OF THE DEMOCRATIC MONOLITH 103–107* (1999).

¹⁰⁵ JAMES A. MORONE, *HELLFIRE NATION: THE POLITICS OF SIN IN AMERICAN HISTORY* (2003).

¹⁰⁶ FREDRICK C. HARRIS, *SOMETHING WITHIN: RELIGION IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN POLITICAL ACTIVISM 39–41* (1999).

¹⁰⁷ JENSEN, *supra* note 102.

¹⁰⁸ MARK A. NOLL, *ONE NATION UNDER GOD? CHRISTIAN FAITH AND POLITICAL ACTION IN AMERICA 105–127* (1988).

¹⁰⁹ *Ecclesiastes* 1:9.