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DECEMBER 2003, No. 7

Clash of Civilizations? Religion and American Attitudes towards Islam and an Invasion of Iraq

Presidents have on occasion employed religious language in speaking about political and international events, imbuing American foreign policy decisions with religious overtones. Perhaps nowhere has this been so evident as in reference to the Middle East. Certainly, with his pronouncements against the “axis of evil,” Bush has used moral and religious language to justify foreign policy positions in the wake of September 11.

What may be less clear is whether religious differences among American constituents actually have a significant impact on their attitudes toward foreign policy. Political ideology, party affiliation, or even social demographics seemingly would be more likely to account for differences in opinion on matters of American foreign policy, particularly since Americans are more prone to divide over domestic issues and unify regarding international concerns, about which they are generally less informed. However, as the Cold War demonstrated, Americans may sometimes see in their political adversary (the USSR) a religious opponent as well (namely, the “godless atheism” of communist Russia), resulting in an increased tendency to place political issues in a more religious or moral framework. In these cases, religious differences can greatly affect American views on foreign policy, perhaps even rousing sufficient religiously-based political concern among large Christian groups to noticeably affect such policy (for example, the impact of conservative Christian and Jewish

groups on America’s support of the state of Israel). Thus, with the attacks of 9/11 and the perceived growing threat from Muslim nations, American Christians may have found a new political and religious opponent to rival that of communist Russia: Islam.

Nonetheless, Americans are currently undecided about just how to view the religion and culture of Islam or how to respond to Muslim nations that seem to pose a threat to American security. Should Islamic terrorist movements be seen as normative of an inherently violent Islam, or should such factions be excluded simply as “extremists” who represent only their own individual fanaticism? Is Islam truly a “religion of peace,” as some have claimed, or should Americans be more wary? Should Christian Americans support preemptive wars against countries dominated by such a menacing religious rival? Responses to these important questions have had, and will continue to have, an important impact on the political views and actions of Americans, especially those with strong religious commitments.

To examine the position Americans are taking on some of these issues, we looked at poll data probing religious commitments as well as views on Islam – specifically questions related to the disarmament and invasion of Iraq. The data are drawn from a Gallup/CNN/ USA Today poll conducted December 9-10, 2002, by the Gallup Organization. This telephone poll of 1009 adults

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contained a variety of questions related to Saddam Hussein, a possible American invasion of Iraq, as well as a question related to the nature of Islam.

As seen in the table, individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals were the most likely to think that removing Saddam was necessary to disarm Iraq, at a large majority of 85 percent. Mainline Protestants and Catholics held similar views, at 82 percent and 81 percent, respectively. Black Protestants, however, were less likely to affirm this position (at 73 percent), and American Jews even less so (63 percent).

Despite these high levels of belief that removing Hussein was necessary for Iraqi disarmament, fewer Americans actually supported a war in Iraq. About half of American evangelicals supported sending ground troops into Iraq (48 percent). Surprisingly, though American Jews were the least likely to think removing Saddam was necessary for disarmament, they were among the most likely to favor the invasion (47 percent supported sending troops). Mainline Protestants were noticeably less in favor of the war than evangelical Protestants—only 41 percent favored an

invasion. Black Protestants, Catholics, and others were even less supportive, at 36 percent, 36 percent, and 31 percent, respectively.

Support for the invasion of Iraq does not appear to be directly related to the respondents' views of Islam itself. Although two-thirds of the evangelical respondents, the leading supporter of the war in Iraq, agreed that Islam encourages violence more than other religious beliefs, other respondents who held this view were not nearly as likely to have supported an invasion. While 59 percent of Catholics held this negative view of Islam, and 81 percent supported removing Saddam, they were among the least likely to support the invasion. Nearly the same percentage of Mainline Protestants (57 percent) also thought that Islam encouraged violence more than other religions, but were more likely than Catholics to also support the invasion (41 percent to 36 percent, respectively). Jews were much less likely than Christians to link Islam with violence (44 percent); however, the number of respondents favoring an invasion was higher than the number believing that Islam encouraged violence more than

other religions. Among Black Protestants and secular respondents there was much less likelihood to hold this view of Islam or to support an invasion.

American religious affiliations do appear to have some role in shaping views on disarmament, invasion, and the nature of Islam. Belief in the necessity of removing Saddam from power to achieve Iraqi disarmament, and a view of Islam as more violent than other religions, generally accompanied support of the invasion, except in the case of American Catholics and Jews. These groups may have been influenced by other commitments, such as the Pope's call for pacifism or Jewish support of the state of Israel. Due to the impact of these commitments, those monitoring public opinion on foreign policy issues in the Middle East should take careful note of the effect that religious differences have among the American public; support or opposition to wars can quickly translate into political support or opposition of the officials behind them.

Casey Rice, Henry Institute Summer McGregor Undergraduate Fellow

Views of Americans on the Disarmament of Iraq, the Invasion of Iraq, and the Nature of Islam

	Remove Saddam to Disarm	Favor Invading Iraq	Islam More Violent
Evangelicals	85%	48%	67%
Mainline Protestants	82%	41%	57%
Black Protestants	73%	36%	38%
Catholics	81%	36%	59%
Jews	63%	47%	44%
Secular	72%	31%	38%

Call for Papers

Symposium on Religion and Politics

Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

April 29 - May 1, 2004

The Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics at Calvin College is sponsoring the second biennial conference on the relationship between religion and politics on April 29 - May 1, 2004, in Calvin's new Prince Conference Center. This symposium is held in the spring of even numbered years.

The purpose of this conference, and future such conferences, is to provide a distinct opportunity for scholars working in this field of study to come together in order to present papers related to their current research, to foster personal and professional networks, to facilitate joint research endeavors, and to learn about research opportunities in the field.

The conference is open to both scholars and graduate students across different disciplines of study (e.g., political scientists, sociologists, historians). Those interested in presenting a paper on any aspect of the relationship between religion and politics (whether it be in terms of political philosophy, public policy, political history, comparative politics, electoral politics, constitutional law, or the sociology of religion) should submit a one-page proposal by February 15, 2004, to:

Corwin Smidt, The Henry Institute at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Phone: (616) 526-6233; Fax: (616) 526-8511

Email: henry@calvin.edu • Web site: www.calvin.edu/henry

Clergy in American Public Life: A Cooperative Research Project

The Henry Institute has been coordinating a major cooperative study project on the role that clergy play in American religious and public life. Some of the initial analyses related to this effort are published in the December 2003 issue of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. The following articles related to this cooperative effort are included in the issue:

- "Black Clergy in the 2000 Election," by Eric McDaniel
- "Catholic Priests and the Political Order: The Political Behavior of Catholic Priests," by Ted Jelen
- "The Political Activity of Evangelical Clergy in the Election of 2000: A Case Study of Five Denominations," by James L. Guth, Linda Beal, Greg Crow, Beverly Gaddy, Steve Montreal, Brent Nelsen, James Penning, and Jeff Walz
- "The Political Attitudes and Activities of Mainline Protestant Clergy in the Election of 2000: A Study of Six Denominations," by Corwin Smidt, Sue Crawford, Melissa Deckman, Donald Gray, Dan Hofrenning, Laura Olson, Sherrie Steiner, and Beau Weston
- "American Rabbis in the 2000 Elections," by Paul Djupe and Anand Sokhey
- "A Liberal Dynamo: The Political Activism of the Unitarian-Universalist Clergy," by John Green
- "The Politics of the Willow Creek Association Pastors," by Lyman Kellstedt and John Green

It is anticipated that several volumes will be forthcoming from the project, including an initial edited volume with chapters that focus on clergy from each of the denominations studied.

Graduate Student Workshop on *Pollsters and Parishioners* Examines Survey Research and American Religion

This summer, the Henry Institute of Calvin College hosted its biennial summer research seminar *Pollsters and Parishioners: Workshop on Survey Research and American Religion*, designated for graduate students and recent Ph. D. graduates in political science, sociology and related disciplines. The workshop was held from July 19 to 26, 2003, and focused on the measurement of religion in survey research and data analysis using major data sets on religion and politics. Professor Corwin Smidt of Calvin College, who also heads the Henry Institute, directed the workshop, along with James Guth of Furman University and Lyman Kellstedt of Wheaton College.

Twelve graduate students participated in the workshop: Amy Burdette, sociology, University of Texas at Austin; Jamie Dolan, sociology, University of Arizona; Conrad Hackett, sociology, Princeton University; Phillip Hardy, political sci-

ence, Arizona State University; Larycia Hawkins, political science, University of Oklahoma; David Hodge, social work, Washington University, St Louis; Jeff Kroll, sociology, University of Arizona; Robert Moore, political science, Michigan State University; Lindsay Moseley, political science, University of Tennessee; Napp Nazworth, political science, University of Florida; Jonathan Peterson, political science, University of Minnesota; and Robert Postic, political science, Wayne State University.

Participants worked on measurement issues, engaged in research projects, and met and interacted with students and scholars sharing similar interests. Overall, the workshop provided a context and opportunity to meet others, exchange ideas, and establish research agendas.

As Jeffrey Kroll of the University of Arizona noted: "The workshop was enjoyable and useful because of the sharp focus on the study of measure-

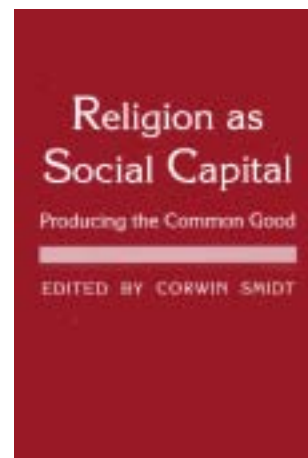
ment of religion. It was beneficial to be surrounded by many people all with a passionate interest in the study of religion; that milieu promoted a wonderful exchange of thoughts and innovative ideas that would be impossible in a more generalized sociological academic situation, such as at the University of Arizona, where there are only a few students of religion."

Robert Postic of Wayne State University commented: "I not only learned more in one week about SPSS than I had in two years of graduate school, I received more insight into how religious belief, belonging, and behavior all play such a crucial role in shaping one's political behavior. It is something that I had believed to be true all along; it is nice to have solid data and research to back up that intuition."

The next biennial "Pollsters and Parishioners" workshop is tentatively scheduled for July 16-23, 2005.

Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good

The Henry Institute is pleased to announce the publication of *Religion as Social Capital*, edited by Corwin Smidt, Director of The Henry Institute. While Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (Simon & Schuster 2000) highlighted the notion of social capital and volunteerism, little attention has been paid to religion's role in generating social capital—an ironic omission, since religion constitutes the most common form of voluntary association in America today. The book features essays and analyses, many of which were given as part of an earlier Henry Institute sponsored conference on Religion, Social Capital, and Democratic Life. This publication is the first book-length, systematic examination of the relationship between religion and social capital and the effect of religious social capital on democratic life in the United States. Copies are available on-line from Amazon.com or from Baylor University Press, 1-800-710-3217 (www.baylorpress.com).



Faith and the Public Arena

On April 28, 2003, Tim Goeglein, the Deputy Director of the White House Office of Public Liaison, delivered the annual Paul Henry Lecture in the Gezon Auditorium at Calvin College. Drawing on his political experience, Goeglein offered a response to the question, “How does a person of faith maintain his or her conviction in the marketplace of ideas without compromising these beliefs?”

According to Goeglein, the key to maintaining his religious integrity while working in politics is realizing that the title he wears at work, “Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of Public Liaison...is secondary to the one that I wear at home: Tim Goeglein, husband, father and follower of Christ.” A faithful public life must be based on an “education, both of the head and the heart,” that “builds the foundation for the good and examined life.”

Goeglein asserts that working for a president who is deeply committed to his own Christian faith has helped him to maintain his personal religious integrity in the political arena. George W. Bush stands in the tradition of presidents like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan who “have turned to the Almighty” during trying times, says Goeglein. By doing so, the current president is able to draw on a “moral compass that can direct you through humility and shame, ego and honor, and ultimately to truth.”



While the difficulties of maintaining a faithful public life are often emphasized, Goeglein also noted the negative impact that public life can have on one’s faith in private, a problem that is frequently ignored. “Juggling family and work,” Goeglein said, “while striving to maintain those cardinal and Christian virtues is the greatest single challenge in my life. Any Christian who has a public role will tell you the same thing.”

Despite the stresses and heavy burdens that come with his job, Goeglein told the audience that it was “a great honor to work for President Bush” and “walk in the footsteps of so many of our country’s great leaders.” His work as a

public servant and, more importantly, his role as a husband, father, and follower of Christ have shown him that “the secret of happiness is the living of one’s life in Christ. Not an abstract construct of God, but to be in Jesus’ real presence.”

This was the seventh Henry Lecture sponsored by the Paul Henry Institute. The aim of the lecture is to garner insight into the relationship between Christianity and politics from a person actively engaged in the political arena. Past speakers have included Pepperdine Professor Stephen V. Monsma, a former member of the Michigan legislature; former U.S. Senators Mark Hatfield of Oregon, Dan Coats of Indiana, Paul Simon of Illinois; U.S. Representative John Lewis of Georgia; and former speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives, Paul Hillegonds. In order to provide a nonpartisan perspective, the lecture alternates between Republicans and Democrats.

After graduating from Indiana University, Goeglein, a Republican, briefly worked as an executive producer of the nightly news for Fort Wayne’s NBC affiliate, subsequently moving to Washington D.C. to work in the press office of Senator Dan Coats. After ten years with Senator Coats, Goeglein was recruited by the Bush-Cheney election campaign to work at its headquarters in Austin. When Bush assumed the presidency, Goeglein was appointed to his present position in the White House Office of Public Liaison.

Henry Website

For more information on Institute publications and other activities of the Henry Institute and its staff, be sure to see our website at www.calvin.edu/henry or contact us at (616) 526-6870.

Scholarly Presentations and Discussions

Sept. 30, 2003. Ron Wells, Calvin College, “*History and Memory: The Fitzroy Presbyterian Church and the Search for Peace in Northern Ireland.*”

Oct. 16, 2003. Jesse Chupp, Texas A&M University, “*The Politics of Grace: The Political Implications of Calvin’s Theology.*”

Nov. 17, 2003. David Leege, Notre Dame University, “*The Politics of Cultural Differences: Disabling Party Coalitions in Contemporary Campaigns.*”

Nov. 17, 2003. Ghazi Briegieth, Israeli and Palestinian Bereaved Families for Peace, “*Turning the Other Cheek: Seeking Peace in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict.*”

Nov. 24, 2003. Benny Giay, Walter Post Theological College in West Papua, Indonesia, “*The Role of the Church in the Human Rights Struggle in West Papua.*”

Feb. 11, 2004. Milay Galvez, Hispanic Outreach Project, “*Church-State Relations In Cuba from the Revolution to Today.*”

Feb. 26, 2004. Alexei Krindatch, Center for Geopolitical Research at the Russian Academy of Sciences, “*Church-State Issues in Post-Soviet Russia.*”

March 2, 2004. Charles Mast, U.S. Foreign Service Office, “*Political Changes in Post-Revolutionary Iraq: Prospects for Continued Democratization.*”

March 9, 2004. John Clark, Western Michigan University, “*Religious Cleavages among Southern Political Activists.*”

April 26, 2004. Robert Edgar, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, former U.S. Representative (D-PA), *8th Annual Henry Lecture.*

April 29 – May 1, 2004. *Symposium on Religion and Politics.*

July 16 - July 23, 2005. Graduate Student Workshop, “*Pollsters and Parishioners.*”

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