



The following is an excerpt from THE CONCISE PRINCETON ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AMERICAN POLITICAL HISTORY, edited by Michael Kazin, Rebecca Edwards, and Adam Rothman. To learn more about this book, please visit <http://press.princeton.edu>. Copyright © 2011 by Princeton University Press. No part of this text may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

### religion and politics since 1945

The United States in the second half of the twentieth century was, paradoxically, both very secular and very religious. Like most other industrialized democracies, it conducted its daily business in a pragmatic and down-to-earth way. At the same time, however, most of its citizens believed that an omnipotent God was watching over them. While the church membership rate in Western Europe had dwindled to just 4 or 5 percent, in the United States it was still over 50 percent. American religion and politics, meanwhile, were linked in complex ways, even though the First Amendment to the Constitution specified their separation.

No aspirant to high political office could be indifferent to religious questions, and every school board in the country had to wrestle with the problem of what religious symbols and activities they should allow on their campuses without displeasing the Supreme Court. The evangelist Billy Graham befriended every president between Harry Truman and George W. Bush, and all of them valued his goodwill. As recently as 2007, the governor of Georgia held a meeting on the steps of his state capitol, during a drought, to beseech God for rain.

European sociologists early in the twentieth century predicted a continuous process of secularization for industrial societies, and the experience of most nations vindicated them. Why was the United States such an exception? Numerous theories were offered at the time. One was that the United States had such a diverse population, drawn from so many immigrant groups (voluntary and unfree), that religion was used to hold on to the vestiges of an older identity. Rural Italian immigrants, for example, had to turn themselves into urban industrial workers when they came to America and had to learn English, but they could still be Roman Catholics. A second theory was that a highly mobile population sought a proxy form of community and found it by joining churches as they moved from one city to the next. A third was that church-state separation, which denied state support to any church, forced religious leaders to act like businessmen, seeking out “customers” and making sure they offered a “product” to the liking of their clients; otherwise they would not get paid. A fourth, often advanced during an upsurge in religiosity in the 1950s, was that the fear of annihilation in a nuclear war was so intense that it drove anxious men and women back to churches and synagogues for reassurance. All these theories could find empirical support; together they went far to explain the anomalous American situation.

### The Cold War

Many Americans perceived the cold war as a conflict of both political and religious significance, in which the United States, champion of religion, confronted

“godless communism.” Emphasizing that America stood not just for democratic capitalism but also for religious freedom was a way of sharpening and clarifying the face-off. Among the organizations advocating militant anti-Communist policies in the 1950s was the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, whose leader, Fred Schwartz, regarded communism as a substitute religion, a horrible parody of Christianity. President Dwight Eisenhower inspired some observers and amused others by declaring that America itself made no sense without “a deeply held religious faith—and I don’t care what it is!” This was a way of affirming a point that was later made more formally by sociologist Robert Bellah: that America has a civil religion in addition to its citizens’ many particular religions. Eisenhower also authorized the inclusion of the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance and the stamping of “In God We Trust” on currency.

The fact that America’s defense policy was based on nuclear deterrence added an apocalyptic dimension to the cold war. A nuclear war could do the kind of world-shattering damage that until then only God had been able to accomplish—and that he had promised Noah he would never do again after the great flood. Nuclear weapons themselves occasioned an anguished religious debate. Twenty-two Protestant theologians from the Federal Council of Churches declared that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 was “morally indefensible.” The editors of the *Catholic World* agreed, adding that America had “struck the most powerful blow ever delivered against Christian civilization and the moral law.” The hardheaded neo-orthodox theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, a man highly respected among foreign policy makers, wrote in *The Irony of American History* (1952) that America had created for itself an intolerable paradox. Posing as the defender of Christian civilization, it was able to make good on the commitment only by threatening to use a weapon so fearsome, and so indiscriminate, that it would make a mockery of its users’ claim that they believed in a righteous and loving God.

### Civil Rights

The cold war standoff persisted through the 1950s as the United States underwent dynamic changes. None was more significant than the civil rights movement, whose activist phase began in late 1955 with the Montgomery bus boycott. Energized by the Supreme Court’s school desegregation decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Montgomery Improvement Association persuaded African Americans not to ride the city’s segregated buses until the company changed its seating policy. Martin Luther King Jr., a Baptist minister, took command of the boycott and guided it to victory after nearly 13 months. A native of Atlanta whose father was also a prominent minister, King developed a superb preaching style. Boycott meetings in Montgomery were closely akin

to religious revivals; hymn singing and his passionate sermons strengthened the boycotters’ sense of unity and determination to persist.

King went on to become a leader of the nationwide civil rights movement, which succeeded in prompting Congress, over the next decade, to abolish all legally enforced racial segregation and to guarantee the vote to African Americans for the first time since Reconstruction. He had the knack of linking immediate circumstances in the South to transcendent questions of religious significance, a skill demonstrated in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963), which compared his work to that of Jesus and St. Paul in the early Christian communities. It is no coincidence that King and nearly all the other early civil rights movement leaders (Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, Jesse Jackson, and others) were clergymen. Ministers enjoyed high status in the segregated African American community and often brokered agreements between whites and blacks. King, moreover, knew how to appeal to whites as well as blacks in a language drenched in biblical imagery—both races honored the scriptures. The fact that he was also able to achieve a high level of nonviolence gave his group, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the moral high ground, and worked effectively on the consciences of white voters.

### Religion and Politics

The success of the civil rights movement was to have profound consequences not just for African Americans but also for the two main political parties. The Democrats’ electoral base had long been the white Solid South, but as southern blacks began to vote Democrat after the Voting Rights Act of 1965, growing numbers of southern whites began to switch their allegiance to the Republican Party. Party politics was also changed in 1960 by the election of a Roman Catholic, John F. Kennedy, to the presidency. The only other Catholic to run for the presidency up to that time, Al Smith, had been soundly beaten in the election of 1928, partly because southern whites, most of them evangelical Christians, had refused to vote for a Catholic. Anti-Catholicism had a long history in America by 1960, some of it lowbrow bigotry, symbolized by episodes of anti-Catholic rioting in nineteenth-century cities. It could also be refined and well read, however, as Paul Blanshard’s best-selling *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (1949) bore witness. Blanshard, whose book was favorably reviewed in all the mainstream media, argued that Catholics’ loyalty to an absolute monarch, the pope, overrode their loyalty to the nation, making them dubious citizens. He even suggested that Catholics, like Communists, were an internal fifth column, threatening the future of the republic. Kennedy, in the run-up to the 1960 election, appeared before a meeting of evangelical Protestant ministers in Houston and denied having divided loyalties. He later joked to advisors that it was unreasonable for

Blanshard and others to suspect him of disloyalty because he was such a bad Catholic!

During the Kennedy administration, the Supreme Court, under the leadership of Chief Justice Earl Warren, who was already controversial because of the *Brown* decision, issued its findings in several church-state cases: *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Murray v. Curlett* (1963), and *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp* (1963). The Court ruled that collective prayers in public school classrooms, then widespread, were a violation of the First Amendment. So, too, were Bible reading and recitation of the Ten Commandments. The cases had been brought by an alliance of Unitarians, Jews, and atheists, who wanted to strengthen the wall of separation between church and state. Most other religious groups protested against this breach of American tradition, with some arguing that it would give comfort to the Communists and diminish the religious dimensions of the cold war. Numerous draft constitutional amendments appeared before Congress in the following years, trying to reinstate school prayer, but none won the necessary two-thirds majority. At almost the same time (1961), however, the Supreme Court upheld the conviction of Abraham Braunfeld, who claimed his free exercise of religion was abridged by the state of Pennsylvania. An orthodox Jew, Braunfeld closed his furniture store on Saturdays, but the state's Sunday closing laws forbade him to open it then, putting him at an unfair business disadvantage. The Court ruled against him, decreeing that Sunday closing laws served a compelling secular interest, even if their origin could be found in a religious practice.

In the following decades, however, the trend in church-state cases was toward an increasingly emphatic dissociation. In 1983 the Supreme Court even considered a case, *Lynch v. Donnelly*, involving government-owned illuminated Christmas displays—it decided to permit them if nonreligious items like candy canes, Santa Claus, and red-nosed reindeer were there, but to object if the exhibit comprised only a Christian crèche.

### Vietnam

Soon after President Kennedy's death, the American escalation in Vietnam began. In the early days of American involvement, a Catholic doctor, Tom Dooley, who had served there in the 1950s, regarded the war as a battle between Christian South Vietnam and the Communist North; at first Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York and the American Catholic hierarchy agreed. Doubts about the "domino theory," however, along with the lack of a clear military objective and unease about the viability and integrity of the South Vietnamese ally, led to antiwar protests. Religious observers from many different traditions began to think of the war as power politics at its dirtiest—sacrificing Vietnam and its people because the risk of fighting the cold war in Europe was too great. Roger LaPorte, a young Catholic activist, set

fire to himself on the steps of the United Nations in 1965 to protest the war. An interfaith organization, Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam (founded in 1966), agreed to put aside its members' religious differences in its campaign to end the war. It organized protests and sent a delegation to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, led by Rabbi Abraham Heschel, William Sloane Coffin (Protestant), and Daniel Berrigan (Catholic).

Berrigan, a Jesuit priest, also led a group of religious antiwar activists in invasions of two Selective Service offices in the Baltimore area. They poured blood over draft files in the first and set fire to files in the second with homemade napalm, then stood waiting to be arrested, explaining to local journalists the symbolic significance of their actions. Berrigan was convicted but went underground rather than to prison. For a year he was the romantic hero of the religious resistance, showing up unexpectedly to preach in different churches, then disappearing again before the police or FBI could arrest him.

Vietnam also raised anew question of religious conscientious objectors (COs). During World War II the judiciary had permitted members of the historic peace churches, Quakers, Mennonites, and Jehovah's Witnesses, to register as COs and to perform alternative service rather than enter the army. This rule persisted, but now, large numbers of draftees from other traditions also claimed that their consciences forbade them from serving in Vietnam. Such objectors found the Supreme Court partially sympathetic to their point of view in a 1970 decision that permitted objections based on "a deeply held and coherent ethical system," even if it had no explicit religious element. On the other hand, the Court added in a case the following year, CO status would not be granted to protesters against only some wars: it had to be all or nothing.

### American Judaism

Another conflict, the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbors, had a very different effect on American religious history. It galvanized American Jews into a renewed sense of pride, identity, and concern for their community. Jews, only about 3 percent of the American population in 1945—most of them children or grandchildren of immigrants—had been preoccupied with assimilation, often trying to minimize the distinctive elements of their way of life. Except among a handful of Orthodox communities, mainly in the New York area, Jews tended to blend in rather than stand out in the 1950s and early 1960s. Many opted to join Conservative synagogues, to keep kosher tradition at home but not elsewhere, not to wear distinctive garments like the *kippah* in public, and at times even to placate their fretful children in December by celebrating Christmas. Inter-marriage rates between Christians and Jews rose steadily.

Three trends changed this trajectory toward assimilation. First was Israel, which since its creation

in 1948 had to fight for its existence. Israel's leaders hoped that well-to-do American Jews would migrate there, bringing their wealth, education, and skills. Most declined to do so, but they did lobby on behalf of Israel, made sure its point of view was well represented in Congress, and sent financial contributions. Second was the rediscovery of the Holocaust. Many Jews' first instinct had been to forget about it—very little literature discussed it in the 1950s—but after Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) it became a central issue in American Jewish education and self-definition; her book was followed by a flood of Holocaust-related literature. Third was the Six-Day War itself, which, though it ended victoriously for Israel, showed that Jews still faced terrifying enemies eager to annihilate them. In the aftermath, contributions to Israel and American Jews' decision to migrate there rose sharply. Modern Orthodoxy began to develop in the late 1960s and 1970s, a form of Judaism that permitted full engagement in American life without compromising religious distinctiveness and observance. Ensuring American Jews' support, meanwhile, remained a high priority among Israeli politicians. It led to a controversy, which continues to the present, over whether "the Jewish lobby" is a disproportionately powerful element in American political life and whether it prompts the American government to act in ways that are more beneficial to Israel than to the United States itself.

### Abortion Politics

The 1960s witnessed great social turbulence and a rapid shift in public mores, many of which had religious and political implications. The women's movement, for example, lobbied for the abolition of gender discrimination in employment and raised a variety of questions under the previously unfamiliar category of "sexual politics."

One was the issue of abortion, which has convulsed American religious and political life ever since. The Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) that women could legally obtain abortions in the first trimester of a pregnancy and, with some restrictions, in later stages of pregnancy. The decision overturned laws in all 50 states. It delighted feminists who had been working for revision of restrictive abortion laws, in line with their belief that women should have the right to choose whether or not to give birth. But it horrified those believers who considered an unborn fetus to be a human being and who saw the ruling, in effect, as authorizing the killing of children. Subsequent decisions of the Court, notably *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), upheld the *Roe* precedent but had the effect of embittering political and judicial life; advocates of each side found it difficult to sympathize with the other.

The first antiabortion activists were Catholics. Some lobbied for legal restrictions or a constitutional amendment; others undertook direct action, picketing abortion clinics and trying to persuade pregnant

women to carry their babies to term, offering them and their babies material and psychological support. In the 1980s, the movement became more radical; Randall Terry's Operation Rescue brought large numbers of "pro-life" evangelical Protestants into direct activism side by side with Catholics, a combination that would have been unlikely prior the 1960s. Operation Rescue worked across denominational lines and tried to get large numbers of its members arrested at the Democratic convention of 1988 in Atlanta, packing the jails as a symbolic way of bringing attention to the issue. In the 1990s a trio of the most extreme activists, Michael Griffin, Paul Hill, and Shelley Shannon, assassinated abortion providers in the firm belief that God authorized this drastic step. The effect of their attacks was almost certainly counterproductive, horrifying not only most American citizens but also the majority of religious pro-lifers, who were explicitly dedicated to the sanctity of life.

### The New Christian Right and Left

This turn to activism bore witness to an important trend in the 1970s, the return of evangelicals and fundamentalists to active politics. Ever since the Scopes trial of 1925, most fundamentalists (Protestants who thought of the Bible as literally true and accurate, the direct and dependable word of God) had withdrawn from public life. Many of them were dispensational premillennialists, believers that the second coming of Jesus was very close and that it was more important to turn to Jesus individually than to work on transforming society. In the 1970s, dismayed by sexual permissiveness, unfamiliar new roles for women, legal abortion, and what seemed like the breakdown of the family, they began to return to political life, joining Christian lobbies like Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. Their theorist was the theologian Francis Schaeffer, who urged them to contest what he thought of as the growing power of evil in the world. They were also goaded into action by what was, to them, the disappointing presidency of Jimmy Carter: A born-again evangelical Christian, Carter should have been solidly behind their program but in practice seemed too willing to accept the orthodoxy of the Democratic Party on gender and family questions. He was also an advocate of détente with the Soviet Union, despite its persecution of Russian Christians and Jews.

The New Religious Right drew the lion's share of media attention in the late 1970s and early 1980s, not least because it contributed to the defeat of Carter and the election of an outspoken conservative, Ronald Reagan. It would be quite wrong, however, to imagine that religion was, as a whole, a conservative force in American life. Religious feminists had begun to transform gender roles inside churches and synagogues, while religious anti-Vietnam activists could be found, a few years later, working in poverty programs and in the "sanctuary" movement, helping Nicaraguan and Salvadoran refugees in the Southwest, or working in the environmental movement.

Stewardship of God's creation was, in the view of many Christians, a religious imperative.

This way of looking at nature also prompted a renewed assessment of nuclear weapons. They remained in the 1980s, as in the 1950s, the basis of America's defense policy, but a growing religious antinuclear movement considered them utterly incompatible with civilization and common decency. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote a pastoral letter on the issue, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response" (1983), condemning the targeting of Soviet cities and coming close to opposing any policy that condoned the use of nuclear weapons. Once a dependable bloc of anti-Communists, the bishops were now staking out new territory, openly critical of their government. Many of the Protestant churches wrote comparable letters. One Methodist bishop, John Warman of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, signed his denomination's letter and told a journalist: "You cannot boil seven million human beings in their own juices and then speak of Christian love. It would be far better for us to trust the God of the Resurrection and suffer death than to use such a weapon."

Other Christians dissented sharply; Michael Novak, a lay Catholic and political conservative, wrote "Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age" (1983), a book-length answer to the bishops that filled an entire special issue of *National Review*. Invoking the tradition of "just war theory," as had the bishops, he argued that nuclear weapons were actually instruments of peace. Paradoxically, the government *used* them by *not* firing them, merely threatening to do so, and in this way assured the maximum of deterrence with the minimum of destruction.

### Religious Celebrities

Everyone can be grateful that the cold war ended without an exchange of nuclear missiles. The Soviet empire in Eastern Europe began to unravel in 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, Germany was reunified, and in 1991 Soviet communism itself came to a peaceful end.

Several individuals who played prominent roles in this world-changing sequence of events became political-religious celebrities in America. One was Lech Walesa, the Gdansk dockyard worker whose Solidarity movement created a new center of legitimacy inside Communist Poland in the 1980s and made him a luminous figure to human rights activists. The Catholic faith had the same kind of function for Solidarity as evangelical Christianity had had in the American civil rights movement, binding members together and empowering them to resist unjust power. A second individual who became prominent in America was Karol Wojtyła, who in 1978 was elevated to the papacy and chose the name Pope John Paul II. Also Polish, and the former archbishop of Krakow, Wojtyła's life and work demonstrated that Christianity, even when persecuted, could outlast

communism. His visits to America drew vast crowds of Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Several other religious figures also played symbolically important roles in movements to resist political oppression. One was the Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a Russian Orthodox exile in America from 1975, who gave the commencement address at Harvard in 1978; another was the Anglican South African bishop Desmond Tutu, a leading antiapartheid activist. A third was the Dalai Lama, religious leader of the Tibetan community in exile, who embodied Buddhist resistance to the Chinese conquest of Tibet. All were revered in America and helped discredit the regimes against which they campaigned.

### The Changing Religious Landscape

By 1990 historians and sociologists were observing seismic shifts in American religious life. First was the steady decline in membership and influence of "mainstream" Protestant churches. Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and Lutherans, who had once dominated the religious landscape, faced dwindling congregations, whereas the Assemblies of God, Disciples of Christ, Southern Baptists, and independent Christian churches enjoyed rapid increases. These growing congregations, many under the leadership of charismatic evangelical leaders, imposed tough rules on their members, expecting them to tithe (give a tenth of their pretax income to the church) and follow exacting codes of personal conduct. They provided foot soldiers for the Moral Majority and for its successor, the Christian Coalition, and campaigned hard for seats on school boards, city councils, and state assemblies.

A second shift was the increasing politicization of religious life. The sharpest divisions had once been between denominations, but now separation was deepest between the religious left and the religious right, often with representatives of both points of view in the same denomination. Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow charted this shift in his influential book *The Restructuring of American Religion* (1988).

Denominational conferences squabbled over theological and doctrinal questions, and over whether to regard scripture as inerrant. The wider public felt the effect of these disputes in renewed attacks on the teaching of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Evangelicals on school boards argued that school science curricula should include "Creation science," an approach to human origins that was consonant with the creation narrative in Genesis. They were aware, however, that the Supreme Court would reject that approach if they made its religious provenance explicit. Proponents therefore claimed that they were indeed advancing a genuine science, rather than a religious point of view in religious dress. The Institute for Creation Research in San Diego backed up this claim. Their antagonists, an alliance of nonfundamentalist Christians, Jews, and academic scientists, countered that creation science was a bogus form of

special pleading, and that the evolutionary hypothesis alone could explain the nature of life on Earth. Several southern states passed laws in the 1980s that were hospitable to creationists, only to see them rejected by the courts on First Amendment grounds. Evangelical activists on school boards also tried to stop sex education classes or else convert them into advocacy seminars on sexual abstinence.

At the same time, independent Christian schools thrived as places where evangelical teachings on creation and sexuality could be central to the curriculum. In southern states, many of these schools were attractive to white parents who disparaged the effects of public school desegregation.

A more radical alternative was homeschooling. The homeschooling movement had begun among advocates of the 1960s counterculture, who protested the repressive and conformist nature of public education. Ironically, it was overtaken by Christian homeschoolers who thought public education was too secular, undisciplined, ideologically biased against religion, and tended to expose students to excessive peer pressure. Homeschool organizations lobbied successfully for state laws entitling them to educate their children at home so long as they met basic standards of literacy and numeracy.

### **New Religions**

These developments bore witness to the continuing energy and diversity of American religious life. So did the growth of new religions, hundreds of which had sprung up throughout American history. Many lasted only a few years, but a few, like the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Nation of Islam, struck a resonant chord among citizens and became permanent parts of the religious landscape. The sharp divisions in American national life during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s prompted the creation of a new crop of religions, a few of which had political implications. Some put such psychological pressure on their members that anxious relatives sought government prevention or regulation of what they perceived as brainwashing. Other groups demanded the handing over not just of a tenth but of all a member's property. Some sheltered illegal sexual practices.

Two dramatic incidents illustrated these dangers. The first was the fate of the People's Temple, under the leadership of Jim Jones. It began as a Christian Pentecostal church in Indianapolis and was the city's first fully racially integrated congregation. The church moved to rural California in 1964, when Jones became convinced that nuclear war was imminent. Then it became involved in San Francisco politics when Jones's preaching proved effective at reforming drug addicts. Finally, Jones, under investigation for financial and sexual irregularities and convinced that he was the target of government persecution, moved the People's Temple to a settlement that became known as Jonestown, in Guyana,

South America. The parents of some members asked a California congressman, Leo Ryan, to investigate the church, and his arrival at Jonestown in November 1978 triggered a horrific finale. A group of Jones's men ambushed and killed Ryan, then the whole community—900 men, women, and children—drank cyanide-poisoned Kool-Aid in a mass suicide ritual, something they had practiced in the foregoing months.

The second incident involved the Branch Davidians, a splinter group from the Seventh-Day Adventists, which was led by charismatic preacher David Koresh. Koresh, like Jones, had sexual relationships with a variety of the group's members. When rumors surfaced in 1993 that his partners included children, the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms raided the compound in Waco, Texas. The group fought back, FBI armored cars rolled in, and the two sides exchanged gunfire and tear gas for several days. The entire compound eventually caught fire and burned to the ground, killing 103 people, including at least 17 children. Public reaction was sharply divided; to some citizens drastic action against cults was necessary. Others saw the government's heavy-handedness as disgraceful and disproportionate. This second view gained credibility when it later emerged that Timothy McVeigh—who two years later blew up a federal building in Oklahoma City—had been convinced by the Waco affair that the federal government was at war with ordinary citizens.

Increasing religious diversity included not just new sects and cults but also the arrival in America of larger numbers of non-Judeo-Christian peoples than ever before. The Immigration Reform Act of 1965 abolished racial and geographical discrimination in immigrants' point of origin and opened the way for large-scale immigration from Africa and Asia. America's wealth and political stability, along with First Amendment protection to all religions, made it an extremely desirable destination. Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim communities grew in many cities, while scholars hurried to study them and to widen the ideal of American inclusiveness. For many of these immigrants from societies where restriction and intolerance were the norm, America was a pleasant surprise. Some American Muslims took the view that the United States was the ideal place in which to practice Islam. The international situation, however, tended to work against this easy accommodation. Surges of anti-Islamic prejudice coincided with such events as the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis (1978–80), the first Gulf War (1990–91), and the attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon (2001). After the latter event, politicians, led by President George W. Bush, took the view that the United States would protect all forms of religious practice, Islam included, but would make unceasing war on militarized forms of Islamic fundamentalism.

### The Catholic Child Abuse Scandal

Balancing the two imperatives specified in the First Amendment—free exercise and no establishment—has never been easy, as a new scandal made clear at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Journalistic investigations uncovered widespread sexual abuse of children and teenagers by Catholic priests, and evidence showed that it had been going on for a long time. Church authorities had earlier reacted to reports of predatory priests not by turning them over to the law—which would cause scandal and discredit—but by reassigning them to new parishes with a promise of reform. The reform rarely worked, and abuse recurred. The Catholic Church was sued successfully by victims and their families, and it sustained catastrophic losses and was forced to sell assets to cover the cost of judgments against it. The scandal raised the possibility that religious freedom had provided cover for misconduct, and that closer scrutiny would have prevented it, just as closer scrutiny of cults could have prevented the tragedies of Jonestown and Waco. The cost of scrutiny would also be high, however, both financially and in the erosion of civil liberties.

The scandal in the Catholic Church bore witness to the inextricable mixing of religion and politics in American life. As the twenty-first century began, the United States remained the most religiously diverse nation in the world, and the most religiously active among the Western industrial democracies. Its hospitality to religions of all kinds, and the prosperity of these groups, took visible form in the shape of beautiful new churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques. America maintained a high degree of religious freedom, offered tax exemption to all alike, and tried to ensure that all enjoyed free exercise. It was reasonable to anticipate that this state of affairs would persist.

**FURTHER READING.** Patrick Allitt, *Religion in America since 1945: A History*, 2003; Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96 (Winter 1967), 1–21; Walter Capps, *The New Religious Right: Piety, Patriotism, and Politics*, 1990; David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the People's Temple, and Jonestown*, 1988; Richard W. Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*, 1987; Marvin Frankel, *Faith and Freedom: Religious Liberty in America*, 1994; David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 1988; Francine DuPlessix Gray, *Divine Disobedience: Profiles in Catholic Radicalism*, 1970; Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion, Volume 3: Under God, Indivisible, 1941–1960*, 1996; James Risen and Judy Thomas, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War*, 1998; Mark Silk, *Spiritual Politics: Religion and America since World War II*, 1988; James Tabor, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America*, 1995; Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America*, 1993; Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II*, 1988.

PATRICK ALLITT