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God's Country?

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Summary: Religion has always been a major force in U.S. politics, but the recent surge in the number and the power of evangelicals is recasting the country's political scene -- with dramatic implications for foreign policy. This should not be cause for panic: evangelicals are passionately devoted to justice and improving the world, and eager to reach out across sectarian lines.

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EVANGELICALS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Religion has always been a major force in U.S. politics, policy, identity, and culture. Religion shapes the nation's character, helps form Americans' ideas about the world, and influences the ways Americans respond to events beyond their borders. Religion explains both Americans' sense of themselves as a chosen people and their belief that they have a duty to spread their values throughout the world. Of course, not all Americans believe such things -- and those who do often bitterly disagree over exactly what they mean. But enough believe them that the ideas exercise profound influence over the country's behavior abroad and at home.

In one sense, religion is so important to life in the United States that it disappears into the mix. Partisans on all sides of important questions regularly appeal to religious principles to support their views, and the country is so religiously diverse that support for almost any conceivable foreign policy can be found somewhere.

Yet the balance of power among the different religious strands shifts over time; in the last generation, this balance has shifted significantly, and with dramatic consequences. The more conservative strains within American Protestantism have gained adherents, and the liberal Protestantism that dominated the country during the middle years of the twentieth century has weakened. This shift has already changed U.S. foreign policy in profound ways.

These changes have yet to be widely understood, however, in part because most students of foreign policy in the United States and abroad are relatively unfamiliar with conservative U.S. Protestantism. That the views of the evangelical Reverend Billy Graham lead to quite different approaches to foreign relations than, say, those popular at the fundamentalist Bob Jones University is not generally appreciated. But subtle theological and cultural differences can and do have important political consequences. Interpreting the impact of religious changes in the United States on U.S. foreign policy therefore requires a closer look into the big revival tent of American Protestantism.

Why focus exclusively on Protestantism? The answer is, in part, that Protestantism has shaped much of the country's identity and remains today the majority faith in the United States (although only just). Moreover, the changes in Catholicism (the second-largest faith and the largest single religious denomination in the country) present a more mixed picture with fewer foreign policy implications. And finally, the remaining religious groups in the United States are significantly less influential when it comes to the country's politics.

A QUESTION OF FUNDAMENTALS

To make sense of how contemporary changes in Protestantism are starting to affect U.S. foreign policy, it helps to understand the role that religion has historically played in the country's public life. The U.S. religious tradition, which grew out of the sixteenth-century Reformations of England and Scotland, has included many divergent ideologies and worldviews over time. Three strains, however, have been most influential: a strict tradition that can be called fundamentalist, a progressive and ethical tradition known as liberal Christianity, and a broader evangelical tradition. (Pentecostals have theological differences with non-Pentecostal evangelicals and fundamentalists, but Pentecostalism is an offshoot of evangelical theology, and thus the majority of American Pentecostals can be counted

with evangelicals here.)

It would be wrong to read too much precision into these labels. Most American Christians mix and match theological and social ideas from these and other strands of Protestant and Christian thought with little concern for consistency. Yet describing the chief features of each strand and their implications for the United States' role in the world will nevertheless make it easier to appreciate the way changes in the religious balance are shaping the country's behavior.

Fundamentalists, liberal Christians, and evangelicals are all part of the historical mainstream of American Protestantism, and as such all were profoundly affected by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century. For much of the 1800s, most Protestants believed that science confirmed biblical teaching. When Darwinian biology and scholarly "higher criticism" began to cast increasing doubt on traditional views of the Bible's authorship and veracity, however, the American Protestant movement broke apart. Modernists argued that the best way to defend Christianity in an enlightened age was to incorporate the new scholarship into theology, and mainline Protestant denominations followed this logic. The fundamentalists believed that churches should remain loyal to the "fundamentals" of Protestant faith, such as the literal truth of the Bible.

The fundamentalists themselves were divided into two strands, originally distinguished as much by culture and temperament as by theology. The "separatists" argued that true believers should abandon churches that compromised with or tolerated modernism in any form. As U.S. society and culture became more secular and pluralistic, the separatists increasingly withdrew from both politics and culture. The other strand of the original fundamentalist movement sought continual engagement with the rest of the world. This strand was originally called neo-evangelical. Today, the separatists proudly retain the label of fundamentalist, while the neo-evangelicals have dropped the prefix and are now simply known as evangelicals.

The three contemporary streams of American Protestantism (fundamentalist, liberal, and evangelical) lead to very different ideas about what the country's role in the world should be. In this context, the most important differences have to do with the degree to which each promotes optimism about the possibilities for a stable, peaceful, and enlightened international order and the importance each places on the difference between believers and nonbelievers. In a nutshell, fundamentalists are deeply pessimistic about the prospects for world order and see an unbridgeable divide between believers and nonbelievers. Liberals are optimistic about the prospects for world order and see little difference between Christians and nonbelievers. And evangelicals stand somewhere in between these extremes.

Self-described fundamentalists are a diverse group, partly because there are many competing definitions of the term "fundamentalist" and, in keeping with the decentralized and sectarian character of American Protestantism, there is no generally accepted authoritative body to define what fundamentalists are or believe. As used here, the term "fundamentalist" involves three characteristics: a high view of biblical authority and inspiration; a strong determination to defend the historical Protestant faith against Roman Catholic and modernist, secular, and non-Christian influence; and the conviction that believers should separate themselves from the non-Christian world. Fundamentalists can be found throughout conservative Protestant Christianity, and some denominations more properly considered evangelical (such as the Southern Baptists and the Missouri Synod Lutherans) have vocal minorities that could legitimately be called fundamentalist. Fundamentalist denominations, such as the ultra-Calvinist Orthodox Presbyterian Church, tend to be smaller than liberal and evangelical ones. This is partly because fundamentalists prefer small, pure, and doctrinally rigorous organizations to larger, more diverse ones. It is also because many fundamentalist congregations prefer to remain independent of any denominational structure.

Many outsiders think of fundamentalism as an anti-intellectual and emotional movement. And it is true that most conservative American Protestants attach great importance to emotional and personal spiritual experience. But the difference between fundamentalists and evangelicals is not that fundamentalists are more emotional in their beliefs; it is that fundamentalists insist more fully on following their ideas to their logical conclusion. Fundamentalists are more interested than evangelicals in developing a consistent and all-embracing "Christian worldview" and then in systematically applying it to the world. It is one thing to reject (as many evangelicals do) Darwinian evolution because personal experience leads one to consider the Bible an infallible guide. It is something else entirely to develop (as some fundamentalists do) an alternative paradigm of "scientific creationism," write textbooks about it, and seek to force schools to teach it or withdraw one's children from those schools that will not. Fundamentalist-dominated institutions, such as the Independent Baptist movement and Bob Jones University, are not hotbeds of snake-handling revivalist Holy Rollers but host intense, if often unconventional, scholarship.

Devastated by a string of intellectual and political defeats in the 1920s and 1930s, fundamentalists retreated into an isolation and a pessimism that were foreign to the optimistic orientation of nineteenth-century American

Protestantism. The effect of this retreat was to give fundamentalists a defensive and alienated outlook that bore a marked resemblance to the Puritan Calvinism of early New England. Like the Puritans, many fundamentalists hold the bleak view that there is an absolute gap between those few souls God has chosen to redeem and the many he has predestined to end up in hell. Calvinists once labored to establish theocratic commonwealths -- in Scotland by the Covenanters and the Kirk Party, in England during Oliver Cromwell's ascendancy, and in New England, all during the seventeenth century. But in the last three centuries, theocratic state building has become both less attractive to and less feasible for hard-line fundamentalists. It is not only that demographic changes have made it difficult to imagine circumstances in which fundamentalists would constitute a majority. The experience of past commonwealths also shows that successor generations usually lack the founders' fervor. Sadder and wiser from these experiences, contemporary American fundamentalists generally believe that human efforts to build a better world can have only very limited success. They agree with the nineteenth-century American preacher Dwight Moody, who, when urged to focus on political action, replied, "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said, 'Moody, save all you can.'"

If fundamentalists tend to be pessimistic about the prospects for social reform inside the United States, they are downright hostile to the idea of a world order based on secular morality and on global institutions such as the United Nations. More familiar than many Americans with the stories of persecuted Christians abroad, fundamentalists see nothing moral about cooperating with governments that oppress churches, forbid Christian proselytizing, or punish conversions to Christianity under Islamic law. To institutions such as the UN that treat these governments as legitimate, they apply the words of the prophet Isaiah: "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell we are at agreement." It is no coincidence that the popular Left Behind novels, which depict the end of the world from a fundamentalist perspective, show the Antichrist rising to power as the secretary-general of the UN.

Fundamentalists, finally, are committed to an apocalyptic vision of the end of the world and the Last Judgment. As biblical literalists, they believe that the dark prophecies in both the Hebrew and the Greek Scriptures, notably those of the book of Revelation, foretell the great and terrible events that will ring down the curtain on human history. Satan and his human allies will stage a final revolt against God and the elect; believers will undergo terrible persecution, but Christ will put down his enemies and reign over a new heaven and a new earth. This vision is not particularly hospitable to the idea of gradual progress toward a secular utopia driven by technological advances and the cooperation of intelligent people of all religious traditions.

LIBERAL THINKING

Liberal Christianity finds the core of Christianity in its ethical teachings rather than in its classic doctrines. As far back as the seventeenth century, this current of Christian thinking has worked to demythologize the religion: to separate the kernel of moral inspiration from the shell of legend that has, presumably, accreted around it. Liberal Christians are skeptical about the complex doctrines concerning the nature of Jesus and the Trinity that were developed in the early centuries of the church's history. They are reluctant to accept various biblical episodes -- such as the creation of the world in seven days, the Garden of Eden, and Noah's flood -- as literal narrative. And their skepticism often also extends to the physical resurrection of Jesus and the various miracles attributed to him. Rather than believing that Jesus was a supernatural being, liberal Christians see him as a sublime moral teacher whose example they seek to follow through a lifetime of service -- often directed primarily at the poor. The Unitarian Church, introduced to the United States in 1794 by the English scientist and theologian Joseph Priestly, is a denomination organized around these core ideas. Priestly was a friend of Benjamin Franklin and a significant theological influence on Thomas Jefferson, although both Franklin and Jefferson attended Episcopalian services when they went to church. As Darwinism and biblical criticism led others to question the literal accuracy of many biblical stories, liberalism spread widely through the mainline Protestant denominations -- including the Methodist, Presbyterian, American Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches -- to which the United States' social, intellectual, and economic elites have generally belonged.

Although more doctrinally conservative Christians often consider progressives to be outside the Christian mainstream, liberal Christians claim to represent the essence of Protestantism. The Reformation, in their view, was the first stage of reclaiming the valuable core of Christianity. The original reformers purged the church of the sale of indulgences and ideas such as purgatory, papal infallibility, and transubstantiation. In attacking such established Christian doctrines as the Trinity, original sin, and the existence of hell, liberal Christians today believe they are simply following the "Protestant principle."

Liberal Christianity has a much lower estimate of the difference between Christians and non-Christians than do the other major forms of American Protestantism. Liberal Christians believe that ethics are the same all over the world. Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and even nonreligious people can agree on what is right and what is wrong; every religion has a kernel of ethical truth. The idea of the church as a supernatural society whose members

enjoy special grace plays very little role in liberal Christianity.

Because most liberal Christians (with the important exception of "Christian realists" such as the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr) discard the doctrine of original sin, liberal Christianity leads to optimism both about the prospects for a peaceful world order and about international organizations such as the UN. Indeed, liberal Christians have often seen the fight to establish the kingdom of God as a call to support progressive political causes at home and abroad. They argue that the dark prophecies of Revelation point to the difficulty of establishing a just social order on earth -- but that this order will nonetheless come to pass if everyone works together to build it.

Liberal Protestantism dominated the worldview of the U.S. political class during World War II and the Cold War. Leaders such as Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Dean Acheson, Dwight Eisenhower, and John Foster Dulles were, like most American elites at the time, steeped in this tradition. The liberal Christian approach also opened the door to cooperation with Roman Catholics and Jews, who were then becoming much more influential in the United States. Some of the optimism with which many liberal Christians today approach the problems of world order and cooperation across ethnic and religious lines reflects their earlier success at forming a domestic consensus.

In recent years, however, liberal Christianity has been confronted with several challenges. First, liberal Protestantism tends to evanesce into secularism: members follow the "Protestant principle" right out the door of the church. As a result, liberal, mainline denominations are now shrinking -- quickly. Second, liberal Christians are often only tepidly engaged with "religious" issues and causes. Liberal Christians may be environmentalists involved with the Sierra Club or human rights activists involved with Amnesty International, but those activities take place in the secular world. Third, alienated from the Catholic hierarchy by their position on issues such as abortion and gay rights, and from Jews by their decreasing support for Israel, liberal Christians are losing their traditional role as the conveners of an interfaith community. Finally, the mainline denominations themselves are increasingly polarized over issues such as gay rights. Consumed by internal battles, they are less able to influence U.S. society as a whole.

EVANGELICALS AND THE MIDDLE PATH

Evangelicals, the third of the leading strands in American Protestantism, straddle the divide between fundamentalists and liberals. Their core beliefs share common roots with fundamentalism, but their ideas about the world have been heavily influenced by the optimism endemic to U.S. society. Although there is considerable theological diversity within this group, in general it is informed by the "soft Calvinism" of the sixteenth-century Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius, the thinking of English evangelists such as John Wesley (who carried on the tradition of German Pietism), and, in the United States, the experience of the eighteenth-century Great Awakening and subsequent religious revivals.

The leading evangelical denomination in the United States is the Southern Baptist Convention, which, with more than 16.3 million members, is the largest Protestant denomination in the country. The next-largest evangelical denominations are the African American churches, including the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., and the National Baptist Convention of America (each of which reports having about 5 million members). The predominately African American Church of God in Christ, with 5.5 million members, is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the country, and the rapidly growing Assemblies of God, which has 2.7 million members, is the largest Pentecostal denomination that is not predominately black. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, which has 2.5 million members, is the second-largest predominately white evangelical denomination. Like fundamentalists, white evangelicals are often found in independent congregations and small denominations. So-called parachurch organizations, such as the Campus Crusade for Christ, the Promise Keepers, and the Wycliffe Bible Translators, often replace or supplement traditional denominational structures among evangelicals.

Evangelicals resemble fundamentalists in several respects. Like fundamentalists, evangelicals attach a great deal of importance to the doctrinal tenets of Christianity, not just to its ethical teachings. For evangelicals and fundamentalists, liberals' emphasis on ethics translates into a belief that good works and the fulfillment of moral law are the road to God -- a betrayal of Christ's message, in their view. Because of original sin, they argue, humanity is utterly incapable of fulfilling any moral law whatever. The fundamental message of Christianity is that human efforts to please God by observing high ethical standards must fail; only Christ's crucifixion and resurrection can redeem man. Admitting one's sinful nature and accepting Christ's sacrifice are what both evangelicals and fundamentalists mean by being "born again." When liberal Christians put ethics at the heart of their theology, fundamentalists and evangelicals question whether these liberals know what Christianity really means.

Evangelicals also attach great importance to the difference between those who are "saved" and those who are not. Like fundamentalists, they believe that human beings who die without accepting Christ are doomed to everlasting separation from God. They also agree with fundamentalists that "natural" people -- those who have not been "saved"

-- are unable to do any good works on their own.

Finally, most (although not all) evangelicals share the fundamentalist approach to the end of the world. Virtually all evangelicals believe that the biblical prophecies will be fulfilled, and a majority agree with fundamentalists on the position known as premillennialism: the belief that Christ's return will precede the establishment of the prophesied thousand-year reign of peace. Ultimately, all human efforts to build a peaceful world will fail.

Given these similarities, it is not surprising that many observers tend to confuse evangelicals and fundamentalists, thinking that the former are simply a watered down version of the latter. Yet there are important differences between the fundamentalist and the evangelical worldviews. Although the theological positions on these issues can be very technical and nuanced, evangelicals tend to act under the influence of a cheerier form of Calvinism. The strict position is that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was only intended for the small number of souls God intended to save; the others have no chance for salvation. Psychologically and doctrinally, American evangelicals generally have a less bleak outlook. They believe that the benefits of salvation are potentially available to everyone, and that God gives everyone just enough grace to be able to choose salvation if he wishes. Strict Calvinist doctrine divides humanity into two camps with little in common. In the predominant evangelical view, God loves each soul, is unutterably grieved when any are lost, and urgently seeks to save them all.

All Christians, whether fundamentalist, liberal, or evangelical, acknowledge at least formally the responsibility to show love and compassion to everyone, Christian or not. For evangelicals, this demand has extra urgency. Billions of perishing souls can still be saved for Christ, they believe. The example Christians set in their daily lives, the help they give the needy, and the effectiveness of their proclamation of the gospel -- these can bring lost souls to Christ and help fulfill the divine plan. Evangelicals constantly reinforce the message of Christian responsibility to the world. Partly as a result, evangelicals are often open to, and even eager for, social action and cooperation with nonbelievers in projects to improve human welfare, even though they continue to believe that those who reject Christ cannot be united with God after death.

Evangelicals can be hard to predict. Shocked by recent polls showing that a substantial majority of Americans reject the theory of evolution, intellectuals and journalists in the United States and abroad have braced themselves for an all-out assault on Darwinian science. But no such onslaught has been forthcoming. U.S. public opinion has long rejected Darwinism, yet even in states such as Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina, which have large actively Christian populations, state universities go on teaching astronomy, genetics, geology, and paleontology with no concern for religious cosmology, and the United States continues to support the world's most successful scientific community. Most evangelicals find nothing odd about this seeming contradiction. Nor do they wish to change it -- unlike the fundamentalists. The pragmatism of U.S. culture combines with the somewhat anti-intellectual cast of evangelical religion to create a very broad public tolerance for what, to some, might seem an intolerable level of cognitive dissonance. In the seventeenth century, Puritan Harvard opposed Copernican cosmology, but today evangelical America is largely content to let discrepancies between biblical chronology and the fossil record stand unresolved. What evangelicals do not like is what some call "scientism": the attempt to teach evolution or any other subject in such a way as to rule out the possibility of the existence and activity of God.

Evangelicals are more optimistic than fundamentalists about the prospects for moral progress. The postmillennial minority among them (which holds that Christ will return after a thousand years of world peace, not before) believes that this process can continue until human society reaches a state of holiness: that the religious progress of individuals and societies can culminate in the establishment of a peaceable kingdom through a process of gradual improvement. This is a view of history very compatible with the optimism of liberal Christians, and evangelicals and liberal Christians have in fact joined in many common efforts at both domestic and international moral improvement throughout U.S. history. Although the premillennial majority is less optimistic about the ultimate success of such efforts, American evangelicals are often optimistic about the short-term prospects for human betterment.

In his 2005 book *Imagine! A God-Blessed America: How It Could Happen and What It Would Look Like*, the conservative evangelical Richard Land describes and justifies this evangelical optimism: "I believe that there could be yet another Great Awakening in our country, a nationwide revival. ... Scripture tells us that none of us can know with certainty the day or hour of the Lord's return. Thus, we have no right to abandon the world to its own misery. Nowhere in Scripture are we called to huddle pessimistically in Christian ghettos, snatching converts out of the world."

THE BALANCE OF POWER

Recent decades have witnessed momentous changes in the balance of religious power in the United States. The

membership of the liberal, historically dominant mainline Protestant churches mostly peaked in the 1960s. Since then, while the number of American Christians has grown, membership in the mainline denominations has sharply dropped. According to Christianity Today, between 1960 and 2003, membership in mainline denominations fell by more than 24 percent, from 29 million to 22 million. The drop in market share was even more dramatic. In 1960, more than 25 percent of all members of religious groups in the United States belonged to the seven leading mainline Protestant denominations; by 2003, this figure had dropped to 15 percent. The Pew Research Center reports that 59 percent of American Protestants identified themselves as mainline Protestants in 1988; by 2002-3, that percentage had fallen to 46 percent. In the same period, the percentage of Protestants who identified themselves as evangelical rose from 41 percent to 54 percent.

In 1965, there were 3.6 million Episcopalians in the United States -- 1.9 percent of the total population. By 2005, there were only 2.3 million Episcopalians -- 0.8 percent of the population. Membership in the United Methodist Church fell from 11 million in 1965 to 8.2 million in 2005. In the same period, that in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) fell from 3.2 million to 2.4 million, and the United Church of Christ saw its membership decline by almost 50 percent.

Meanwhile, despite some signs of slowing growth after 2001, the Southern Baptist Convention gained more than 7 million members to become the nation's largest Protestant denomination. Between 1960 and 2003, the Southern Baptists gained more members than the Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and the United Church of Christ together lost. In 1960, there were almost 2 million more Methodists than Southern Baptists in the United States; by 2003, there were more Southern Baptists than Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and members of the United Church of Christ combined.

The impact of these trends on national politics has not been hard to find. Self-identified evangelicals provided roughly 40 percent of George W. Bush's total vote in 2004. Among white evangelicals, Bush received 68 percent of the national vote in 2000 and 78 percent in 2004. (The majority of African American evangelicals continue to vote Democratic. Among Hispanics, Bush ran much stronger among the growing Protestant minority than among Catholics; however, both Hispanic Protestants and Hispanic Catholics were more likely to support Bush if they were religiously observant.) Evangelicals have been playing a major role in congressional and Senate elections as well, and the number of self-identified evangelicals in Congress has increased from around 10 percent of the membership in both houses in 1970 to more than 25 percent in 2004.

Fundamentalists, despite some increase in their numbers and political visibility, remain less influential. This is partly because the pervasive optimism of the United States continues to limit the appeal of ultra-Calvinist theology. Moreover, religious politics in the United States remains a coalition sport -- one that a fundamentalist theology, which continues to view Catholicism as an evil cult, is ill equipped to play. To make matters more complicated, fundamentalists themselves are torn between two incompatible political positions: a sullen withdrawal from a damned world and an ambitious attempt to build a new Puritan commonwealth.

Finally, many evangelicals remain resistant to fundamentalist attitudes. "I believe the Word of God, I'm just not mad about it," explained the Reverend Frank Page, the new president of the Southern Baptist Convention, after his election in June 2006.

OUT IN THE WORLD

The growing influence of evangelicals has affected U.S. foreign policy in several ways; two issues in particular illustrate the resultant changes. On the question of humanitarian and human rights policies, evangelical leadership is altering priorities and methods while increasing overall support for both foreign aid and the defense of human rights. And on the question of Israel, rising evangelical power has deepened U.S. support for the Jewish state, even as the liberal Christian establishment has distanced itself from Jerusalem.

In these cases as in others, evangelical political power today is not leading the United States in a completely new direction. We have seen at least parts of this film before: evangelicals were the dominant force in U.S. culture during much of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. But the country's change in orientation in recent years has nonetheless been pronounced.

Evangelicals in the Anglo-American world have long supported humanitarian and human rights policies on a global basis. The British antislavery movement, for example, was led by an evangelical, William Wilberforce. Evangelicals were consistent supporters of nineteenth-century national liberation movements -- often Christian minorities seeking to break from Ottoman rule. And evangelicals led a number of reform campaigns, often with feminist overtones: against suttee (the immolation of widows) in India, against foot binding in China, in support of female

education throughout the developing world, and against human sexual trafficking (the "white slave trade") everywhere. Evangelicals have also long been concerned with issues relating to Africa.

As evangelicals have recently returned to a position of power in U.S. politics, they have supported similar causes and given new energy and support to U.S. humanitarian efforts. Under President Bush, with the strong support of Michael Gerson (an evangelical who was Bush's senior policy adviser and speechwriter), U.S. aid to Africa has risen by 67 percent, including \$15 billion in new spending for programs to combat HIV and AIDS. African politicians, such as Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo and Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, have stressed their own evangelical credentials to build support in Washington, much as China's Sun Yat-sen and Madame Chiang Kai-shek once did. Thanks to evangelical pressure, efforts to suppress human trafficking and the sexual enslavement of women and children have become a much higher priority in U.S. policy, and the country has led the fight to end Sudan's wars. Rick Warren, pastor of an evangelical megachurch in Southern California and the author of *The Purpose Driven Life* (the single best-selling volume in the history of U.S. publishing), has mobilized his 22,000 congregants to help combat AIDS worldwide (by hosting a conference on the subject and training volunteers) and to form relationships with churches in Rwanda.

Evangelicals have not, however, simply followed the human rights and humanitarian agendas crafted by liberal and secular leaders. They have made religious freedom -- including the freedom to proselytize and to convert -- a central focus of their efforts. Thanks largely to evangelical support (although some Catholics and Jews also played a role), Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998, establishing an Office of International Religious Freedom in a somewhat skeptical State Department.

Despite these government initiatives, evangelicals, for cultural as well as theological reasons, are often suspicious of state-to-state aid and multilateral institutions. They prefer grass-roots and faith-based organizations. Generally speaking, evangelicals are quick to support efforts to address specific problems, but they are skeptical about grand designs and large-scale development efforts. Evangelicals will often react strongly to particular instances of human suffering or injustice, but they are more interested in problem solving than in institution building. (Liberal Christians often bewail this trait as evidence of the anti-intellectualism of evangelical culture.)

U.S. policy toward Israel is another area where the increased influence of evangelicals has been evident. This relationship has also had a long history. In fact, American Protestant Zionism is significantly older than the modern Jewish version; in the nineteenth century, evangelicals repeatedly petitioned U.S. officials to establish a refuge in the Holy Land for persecuted Jews from Europe and the Ottoman Empire.

U.S. evangelical theology takes a unique view of the role of the Jewish people in the modern world. On the one hand, evangelicals share the widespread Christian view that Christians represent the new and true children of Israel, inheritors of God's promises to the ancient Hebrews. Yet unlike many other Christians, evangelicals also believe that the Jewish people have a continuing role in God's plan. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, close study of biblical prophecies convinced evangelical scholars and believers that the Jews would return to the Holy Land before the triumphant return of Christ. Moreover, while the tumultuous years before Jesus' return are expected to bring many Jews to Christ, many evangelicals believe that until that time, most Jews will continue to reject him. This belief significantly reduces potential tensions between evangelicals and Jews, since evangelicals do not, as Martin Luther did, expect that once exposed to the true faith, Jews will convert in large numbers. Luther's fury when his expectation was not met led to a more anti-Semitic approach on his part; that is unlikely to happen with contemporary evangelicals.

Evangelicals also find the continued existence of the Jewish people to be a strong argument both for the existence of God and for his power in history. The book of Genesis relates that God told Abraham, "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee. ... And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee all families of the earth be blessed." For evangelicals, the fact that the Jewish people have survived through the millennia and that they have returned to their ancient home is proof that God is real, that the Bible is inspired, and that the Christian religion is true. Many believe that the promise of Genesis still stands and that the God of Abraham will literally bless the United States if the United States blesses Israel. They see in the weakness, defeats, and poverty of the Arab world ample evidence that God curses those who curse Israel.

Criticism of Israel and of the United States for supporting it leaves evangelicals unmoved. If anything, it only strengthens their conviction that the world hates Israel because "fallen man" naturally hates God and his "chosen people." In standing by Israel, evangelicals feel that they are standing by God -- something they are ready to do against the whole world. Thus John Hagee -- senior pastor of an 18,000-member evangelical megachurch in San Antonio, Texas, and author of several New York Times bestsellers -- writes that if Iran moves to attack Israel, Americans must be prepared "to stop this evil enemy in its tracks." "God's policy toward the Jewish people," Hagee

writes, "is found in Genesis 12:3," and he goes on to quote the passage about blessings and curses. "America is at the crossroads!" Hagee warns. "Will we believe and obey the Word of God concerning Israel, or will we continue to equivocate and sympathize with Israel's enemies?"

The return of the Jews to the Holy Land, their extraordinary victories over larger Arab armies, and even the rising tide of hatred that threatens Jews in Israel and abroad strengthen not only the evangelical commitment to Israel but also the position of evangelical religion in American life. The story of modern Jewry reads like a book in the Bible. The Holocaust is reminiscent of the genocidal efforts of Pharaoh in the book of Exodus and of Haman in the book of Esther; the subsequent establishment of a Jewish state reminds one of many similar victories and deliverances of the Jews in the Hebrew Scriptures. The extraordinary events of modern Jewish history are held up by evangelicals as proof that God exists and acts in history. Add to this the psychological consequences of nuclear weapons, and many evangelicals begin to feel that they are living in a world like the world of the Bible. That U.S. foreign policy now centers on defending the country against the threat of mass terrorism involving, potentially, weapons of apocalyptic horror wielded by anti-Christian fanatics waging a religious war motivated by hatred of Israel only reinforces the claims of evangelical religion.

Liberal Christians in the United States (like liberal secularists) have also traditionally supported Zionism, but from a different perspective. For liberal Christians, the Jews are a people like any other, and so liberal Christians have supported Zionism in the same way that they have supported the national movements of other oppressed groups. In recent decades, however, liberal Christians have increasingly come to sympathize with the Palestinian national movement on the same basis. In 2004, the Presbyterian Church passed a resolution calling for limited divestment from companies doing business with Israel (the resolution was essentially rescinded in 2006 after a bitter battle). One study found that 37 percent of the statements made by mainline Protestant churches on human rights abuses between 2000 and 2004 focused on Israel. No other country came in for such frequent criticism.

Conspiracy theorists and secular scholars and journalists in the United States and abroad have looked to a Jewish conspiracy or, more euphemistically, to a "Jewish lobby" to explain how U.S. support for Israel can grow while sympathy for Israel wanes among what was once the religious and intellectual establishment. A better answer lies in the dynamics of U.S. religion. Evangelicals have been gaining social and political power, while liberal Christians and secular intellectuals have been losing it. This should not be blamed on the Jews.

THE NEW GREAT AWAKENING

The current evangelical moment in the United States has not yet run its course. For secularists and liberals in the United States and abroad, this is a disquieting prospect. Measured optimism, however, would be a better response than horror and panic. Religion in the United States is too pluralistic for any single current to dominate. The growing presence and influence of non-Christian communities in the country -- of Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and, above all, secularists -- will continue to limit the ability of any religious group to impose its values across the board.

Liberals, whether religious or not, may want to oppose the evangelical agenda in domestic politics. For the most part, however, these quarrels can cease at the water's edge. As the rising evangelical establishment gains experience in foreign policy, it is likely to prove a valuable -- if not always easy -- partner for the mostly secular or liberal Christian establishment. Some fears about the evangelical influence in foreign policy are simply overblown. After the attacks of September 11, for example, fears that evangelical Christians would demand a holy war against Islam were widespread. A few prominent religious leaders (generally fundamentalists, not evangelicals) made intemperate remarks; Jerry Falwell, for one, referred to the Prophet Muhammad as "a terrorist." But he was widely rebuked by his colleagues.

U.S. evangelicals generally seek to hold on to their strong personal faith and Protestant Christian identity while engaging with people across confessional lines. Evangelicals have worked with Catholics against abortion and with both religious and secular Jews to support Israel; they could now reach out to Muslims as well. After all, missionary hospitals and schools were the primary contact that most Middle Easterners had with the United States up until the end of World War II; evangelicals managed more than a century of close and generally cooperative relations with Muslims throughout the Arab world. Muslims and evangelicals are both concerned about global poverty and Africa. Both groups oppose the domination of public and international discourse by secular ideas. Both believe that religious figures and values should be treated with respect in the media; neither like the glorification of casual sex in popular entertainment. Both Islam and evangelicalism are democratic religions without a priesthood or hierarchy. Muslims and evangelicals will never agree about everything, and secular people may not like some of the agreements they reach. But fostering Muslim-evangelical dialogue may be one of the best ways to forestall the threat of civilizational warfare.

Nervous observers, moreover, should remember that evangelical theology does not automatically produce Jacksonian or populist foreign policy. A process of discussion and mutual accommodation can in many cases narrow the gap between evangelicals and others on a wide range of issues. Worrying that evangelical politics will help lock the United States into inflexible and extreme positions is a waste of time; working with thoughtful evangelical leaders to develop a theologically grounded approach to Palestinian rights, for example, will broaden the base for thoughtful -- though never anti-Israel -- U.S. policies.

Similarly, engaging evangelicals in broader foreign policy discussions can lead to surprising and (for some) heartening developments. A group of leading conservative evangelicals recently signed a statement on climate change that stated that the problem is real, that human activity is an important contributing cause, that the costs of inaction will be high and disproportionately affect the poor, and that Christians have a moral duty to help deal with it. Meanwhile, evangelicals who began by opposing Sudanese violence and slave raids against Christians in southern Sudan have gone on to broaden the coalition working to protect Muslims in Darfur.

Evangelicals are likely to focus more on U.S. exceptionalism than liberals would like, and they are likely to care more about the morality of U.S. foreign policy than most realists prefer. But evangelical power is here to stay for the foreseeable future, and those concerned about U.S. foreign policy would do well to reach out. As more evangelical leaders acquire firsthand experience in foreign policy, they are likely to provide something now sadly lacking in the world of U.S. foreign policy: a trusted group of experts, well versed in the nuances and dilemmas of the international situation, who are able to persuade large numbers of Americans to support the complex and counterintuitive policies that are sometimes necessary in this wicked and frustrating -- or, dare one say it, fallen -- world.

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