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# A Non-Issue: Barry Goldwater and the Absence of Religion in the Election of 1964

By Vincent J. Cannato

In September 1960, Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy traveled to Houston to speak before a large audience of the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. Kennedy's campaign could not escape accusations that the Catholic candidate was unfit for office because of his religious affiliation. Many liberal, mainline Protestants thought the Catholic Church was a reactionary organization fundamentally opposed to liberalism, democracy, and individual liberty.

In his speech, Kennedy proclaimed his belief in the "absolute" separation of church and state. "I do not speak for my church on public matters," Kennedy assured his audience, "and the church does not speak for me." Whatever issues may come up if he were elected president, Kennedy proclaimed that he would follow his conscience "without regard to outside religious pressure or dictate." In a question-and-answer session after the speech, Kennedy engaged the sometimes-hostile questioning of Protestant ministers in good faith.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Kennedy's Houston speech and the issue of Kennedy's Catholicism during the 1960 presidential campaign, see Thomas J. Carty, *A Catholic in the White House? Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign* (New York, 2004).

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It was a successful performance and although many Protestants were not entirely convinced by Kennedy's speech, he satisfied enough voters with both his words and his bravery in facing the hostile group of ministers that he partially neutralized the religious issue in the campaign. In fact, Richard Nixon, his Republican opponent, now had to answer charges that his Protestant supporters were engaged in religious bigotry against the Catholic Kennedy, although historian Irwin Gellman argues that Nixon very clearly abstained from using the religious issue against Kennedy.<sup>2</sup>

As important as Kennedy's speech was, it clouded a deeper irony: the precedent-setting presidency of John F. Kennedy, overcoming more than a century of Protestant skepticism toward, and even bigotry against, Catholics, was accompanied by a drive toward a secular vision of American politics. To safeguard his political success, Kennedy had to play down not only his suspected allegiance to the Vatican but also the church's views on birth control, federal aid to parochial education, and the constitutionality of an American ambassador to the Vatican; he had to minimize the role that religion played in the nation's civic and political culture. The speech was less a defense of the right of a Catholic to hold office in America, and more of a call toward a secularized vision of politics where religious views were safely circumscribed within the personal sphere.<sup>3</sup>

This was all the more remarkable considering the history of the previous fifteen years. In recent years, scholars have shown how deeply embedded religious themes were in the Cold War rhetoric of Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower (as well as in FDR's defense of American involvement in World War Two) and in the broader civic culture of the earlier Cold War period. In 1954, the sociologist Will Herberg gave a speech titled, "The Biblical Basis of American Democracy," in which he argued that "the conflict between Soviet Communism and the free world is a religious conflict . . . a struggle for the soul of modern man."<sup>4</sup> Historian

<sup>2</sup> This is the thesis of Gellman's forthcoming book on the 1960 election. Gellman shared with the author a draft of a chapter from the book entitled "The Politics of Kennedy's Catholicism." See Irwin Gellman, *The Campaign of the Century: Kennedy, Nixon and the Presidential Election of 1960* (forthcoming, Yale University Press).

<sup>3</sup> The case for Kennedy's speech as a form of secular theology is best made in Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York, 1999), 128–47.

<sup>4</sup> William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge, U.K., 2008), 21.

Jonathan Herzog calls this trend the “spiritual-industrial complex,” playing off Eisenhower’s more famous denunciation of the “military-industrial complex.”<sup>5</sup>

This trend toward the “sacralization” of the Cold War took place within a context of increased religious fervor and church attendance during this period. The 1920s and 1930s has been characterized as the “American Religious Depression,” especially among Protestants. But after World War Two, America saw a religious revival. Church membership rose from 49 percent in 1949 to almost 70 percent by 1960. Among American Catholics, weekly church attendance had reached a high of 75 percent in 1955. Whether it was a reaction to the horrors and dislocations of World War Two or a source of comfort amid an age of nuclear anxiety, Americans flocked to religion in large numbers.<sup>6</sup>

Such a revival can be seen throughout postwar American society. Dwight Eisenhower would become the first president to be baptized in office. The words “under God” were added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, the motto “In God We Trust” was put back on the nation’s currency in 1955, and the National Prayer Breakfast was instituted in 1953. Religious figures became national celebrities. Norman Vincent Peale and Thomas Merton produced best-selling books. Billy Graham gained attention and followers with his evangelical crusades starting in 1947. Fulton Sheen’s television show *Life is Worth Living* drew as many as thirty million viewers in the 1950s, even while going up against the popular Milton Berle, and Sheen earned an Emmy in 1952.<sup>7</sup>

Though scholars have successfully re-inserted religion back into the way we look at the early Cold War, they have been less successful in addressing why this trend toward sacralization turned so quickly into secularization. By the early 1960s, outward appeals to religious values both in the domestic sphere as well as in justifying

<sup>5</sup> Works that build on the religious nature of the Cold War include Jonathan Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York, 2011); Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York, 2012); Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*; Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York, 2015); T. Jeremy Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport, Conn., 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Robert T. Handy, “The American Religious Depression, 1925–1935,” *Church History* 29 (March 1960): 3–16; Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 167–72; Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 440–41; Kruse, *One Nation Under God*, 68.

<sup>7</sup> Kruse, *One Nation Under God*, 68, 99–125.

America's commitment to contain communism, diminished quickly, although they did not disappear entirely.

The Kennedy presidency and his new politics promised a break from the older style of government of Truman and Eisenhower. Examining the early years of the new conservative political movement also reveals secularizing trends. We are accustomed to thinking about an automatic linkage between modern American conservatism and the Religious Right and a more open attitude toward the use of religious language and symbols in the public sphere. The new conservative movement was torn between libertarians concerned about the expansive power of the state and conservative evangelicals and Catholics concerned about moral and social issues.

No political figure embodied the new conservatism during this period more than Barry Goldwater, who viewed his political career and presidential candidacy as a shift against Eisenhower's moderate politics and liberal Rockefeller Republicans. Goldwater is often credited with helping to undo the postwar political consensus by challenging moderate Republicanism and the acceptance of New Deal social welfare programs. In a subtle way, Goldwater also had a place in helping to undo the national consensus around the nation's civic religion of the early Cold War years. Religious themes were not entirely absent from Goldwater's rhetoric nor from his supporters—but Goldwater, much like Kennedy, showed a greater ambivalence toward the public expression of religion in politics. Goldwater's religious supporters were attracted to him not because he framed the Cold War in terms of a broader religiously tinged civic culture, but because he was unafraid to voice his opinions and such forthrightness appealed to many conservatives looking for new answers in the 1960s. For Goldwater, turning away from the postwar political consensus of Truman and Eisenhower also meant turning away from notions of a civic religion. Examining the early career and presidential candidacy of Barry Goldwater, what he left unsaid about politics—in this case religion—tells us as much as what he did say.



Goldwater's own religious background suggests a man similar to Kennedy in terms of the role of religion. Both men relegated

religious belief to the private sphere of individual conscience and made little to no connection between their own religious beliefs and their political positions. Both men were uncomfortable with outward signs of religiosity, organized religion, and most religious leaders. The larger postwar civic religion and the religious undertones of the Cold War seemed to make little impact on both Goldwater and Kennedy.

Barry's father Baron was Jewish, but as Goldwater's biographer Robert Alan Goldberg suggests, Baron was "estranged from his faith." Baron married Josephine Williams, an Episcopalian who took charge of the family's religious worship. Barry was baptized in the Episcopal Church and his mother took her children to Episcopal services. Yet, as Goldberg notes, "Barry developed no interest in any religious theology or doctrine, and he felt no strong attachment to institutionalized religion." When elected as a lay delegate to an Episcopal synod as an adult, Barry did not know what to do and had to ask one of his aides for advice. Goldwater's mother may have been religious, but she impressed upon her son the idea of religion as a form of naturalistic spirituality or deism, finding God not just in church but also in nature. This had a deep impression on Barry, who saw religion as something "personal, private. It's an inner conviction and an inspiration to a better life." With that in mind, Goldwater noted that he "rarely, if ever, talked religion and never used it to appeal to people in politics."<sup>8</sup>

Goldwater made his name in the U.S. Senate during the 1950s as an opponent of the New Deal welfare state and a hawkish anti-communist committed to having America forcefully challenge Soviet communism. Young conservative activists latched onto Goldwater as the person who would save the GOP from Eisenhower/Rockefeller Republicans. To promote their new ideas, they worked with Goldwater on a statement of conservative principles. In 1960, an obscure publisher in Shepherdsville, Kentucky, published Barry Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative*. In the longest section of the book, entitled "The Soviet Menace," Goldwater articulated a plan to bring about the defeat of communism, implicitly criticizing the policies of Truman and Eisenhower. Yet unlike so much of the anti-communist rhetoric of that period, Goldwater made few

<sup>8</sup> Robert Alan Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven, Conn., 1995), 26–27; Barry M. Goldwater with Jack Casserly, *Goldwater* (New York, 1988), 35–36.

references to religion. There was no criticism of “atheistic communism” or appeals to domestic spiritual values to gird the country for the war against communism. Goldwater’s was a secular anti-communist vision that saw communism as potentially destructive to American freedoms—and the freedoms of our allies around the globe.<sup>9</sup>

One issue that showed how this new conservatism would diverge from earlier models was Goldwater’s chapter on education. Federal aid to education had become an important and divisive political issue in the postwar period. Education was largely a local issue, but beginning with the Truman administration, the federal government hoped to provide federal aid to education. The first major attempt in 1949 failed because of opposition from Catholic leaders and politicians who had hoped that some federal aid to education would be allocated to parochial schools. The Catholic demands for federal aid brought about concerns over the separation of church and state and fears of Catholic power. In 1962, John F. Kennedy tried to get a bill on federal aid to education passed but failed again due to Catholic opposition. Goldwater, however, was on neither side of the debate. Instead, he argued that the whole concept of federal aid to education was unconstitutional. In keeping with his limited-government philosophy, Goldwater argued for keeping the federal government out of local public-school funding.<sup>10</sup>

Goldwater’s libertarian ideology owed much to notions of individual liberty and freedom from government intrusion into the lives of citizens. Such an ideology relied little on communitarian notions of religious solidarity, a political ideology that undergirded the so-called “spiritual-industrial complex.” This absence of religious rhetoric is made even more interesting when considering that *The Conscience of a Conservative* was ghost-written by L. Brent Bozell, brother-in-law of William F. Buckley Jr., and a devout Catholic. (Within a few years, Bozell would move his family to Franco’s Spain, searching for a more all-encompassing Catholic experience and founded his own magazine, *Triumph*, which promoted an orthodox

<sup>9</sup> Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Shepherdsville, Ky., 1960). For background on *Conscience of a Conservative*, see Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York, 2001), 61–68.

<sup>10</sup> On the issue of federal aid to education during the Kennedy administration, see Lawrence J. McAndrews, “Beyond Appearances: Kennedy, Congress, Religion, and Federal Aid to Education,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 21 (Summer 1991): 545–57.

Catholic vision.) Buckley's *National Review* led this conservative renaissance and helped to fuse economic free-market theories with an orthodox Catholic vision. Clarence Manion, one of the leaders of the Draft Goldwater movement and the driving force behind the publication of *The Conscience of a Conservative*, was also a conservative Catholic. A former dean of the Notre Dame law school, Manion was removed from his job because of his conservative politics.<sup>11</sup>

The prominence of Catholics within the newly emerging conservative wing of the Republican Party can be seen in the creation of the small, but influential New York Conservative Party. Daniel J. Mahoney and Kieran O'Doherty, two thirty-something Catholic political activists, helped form the party in 1961. Much as with *National Review*, the New York Conservative Party was not an explicitly Catholic movement. However, the party's leadership was almost exclusively Catholic and the party received a large share of its support from working-to-middle-class Catholic voters. "These were guys who were aghast at Vatican II," Mahoney later noted. "The Republicans in New York City had a kind of wealthy-class, Protestant-elite stigma attached to them. Between that and the liberalism of the Rockefeller Republicans, these conservative Catholics just weren't comfortable as Republicans. I would guess the Conservative Party is still more heavily Catholic than either of the major parties." Culturally, Goldwater and the New York Conservatives were quite different. However, the bonds linking them together were a staunch anti-communism and a strong dislike for the Rockefeller wing of the Republican Party, which both Goldwater and the New York Conservatives saw as elitist and too willing to compromise with New Deal, big-government Democrats.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to this support from Catholics, evangelical Christians were attracted to the candidacy of Barry Goldwater. According to historian Darren Dochuk, despite Goldwater not sharing their religious views, these voters believed that the Arizona senator "had the right disposition." His image as a maverick from the Southwest with an "unapologetic approach" greatly attracted

<sup>11</sup> Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 61–68.

<sup>12</sup> On the history of the New York Conservative Party, see George J. Marlin, *Fighting the Good Fight: A History of the New York Conservative Party* (South Bend, Ind., 2002); and Timothy J. Sullivan, *New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism: Redrawing Party Lines* (Albany, N.Y., 2009). Mahoney quoted in Richard Perez-Pena, "Despite Size, Conservative Party is a Force to Reckon With," *New York Times*, December 13, 1999, Section B, p. 1.



many Sunbelt conservative evangelicals. Even before the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, evangelical Christians were organizing themselves in the Republican Party. Fred Schwarz's southern California-based Christian Anti-Communism Crusade mobilized anti-communist conservatives, many of them evangelical Protestants, in the early 1960s. Dochuk notes that although Schwarz's supporters believed that "America's deliverance could only come through Christ's second return," they were attracted to Goldwater as a "short-term fix." Ironically, Christian conservatives mobilizing politically in the early 1960s were deeply attracted to a politician whose religious background was very different from theirs, but who also saw religion as exclusively a private matter. His staunch anti-communism, skepticism of the federal government, and his attacks against the so-called "Eastern Establishment" all endeared Goldwater to Sunbelt religious conservatives.<sup>13</sup>

Dochuk has noted how influential Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative* was to these conservative Protestant evangelicals, noting that the book "read like the literature they obtained from church bookstores." Despite this appeal to the political instincts of conservative Christians, Goldwater's conservative ideology was based almost entirely upon secular ideas. Religious themes or issues were almost entirely missing from the book. The foreword of *The Conscience of a Conservative* does contain a single bow to natural law, arguing that the "laws of God, and of, nature, have no date-line." Conservative truths, Goldwater claims, "are derived from the nature of man and from the truths that God has revealed about His creation." Goldwater biographer Lee Edwards points to this quote, and a few others from this time, to argue that Goldwater did indeed believe in the place of religion in politics. But the quote from *Conscience of a Conservative* is an outlier—nothing else in the book strikes this theme and the natural law ideas seem much more consonant with the Catholic Bozell than with the nominally Episcopalian Goldwater. Goldwater would never attempt to frame his views on limited government according to natural law principles and what few references to religion he made appeared to be

<sup>13</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York, 2011), 223–28; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J., 2001), 54–55, 60–61.

mere boilerplate and held little in common with the rhetoric of the broader bipartisan civic religion of the 1950s.<sup>14</sup>

In 1962, the Supreme Court provided a political issue that had the potential to galvanize religious conservatives. Following some ambivalent court rulings in the late 1940s regarding public funding for parochial schools, the Supreme Court in 1962 ruled in *Engel v. Vitale* that mandatory prayers in public schools violated the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. In a 6–1 decision, Justice Hugo Black, writing for the majority, stated: "It is no part of the business of government to compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite as a part of a religious program carried on by government." The decision, in the words of one constitutional scholar, was "a wildly unpopular decision" and engendered "more public hostility than almost any previous opinion in the Court's history, certainly since it had sanctioned slavery a century earlier."<sup>15</sup>

Former presidents Herbert Hoover and Dwight Eisenhower publicly blasted the decision. Francis Cardinal Spellman, archbishop of New York, was "shocked and frightened" by the decision, which he felt "strikes at the heart of the godly tradition in which America's children have for so long been raised." Organizations from the General Federation of Women's Clubs to the American Legion mobilized against *Engel*. The following year, the court came out with another decision, *Abington School District v. Schempp*, that declared mandated Bible readings in public schools unconstitutional. Both *Engel* and *Abington* stripped public schools of overt religious references, a situation that was widely common across the nation even in the early 1960s. In doing so, the court unleashed a powerful wave of secularization of American public spaces.<sup>16</sup>

Given the backlash against the *Engel* decision and its massive unpopularity, one would assume that a well-organized public and political campaign could overturn or modify the decision. A Gallup Poll showed that 77 percent of Americans disapproved of the *Engel* decision. New York Republican congressman Frank Becker, whose

<sup>14</sup> Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, D.C., 1995), 463–64.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce J. Dierenfield, *The Battle over School Prayer: How Engel v. Vitale Changed America* (Lawrence, Kans., 2007), 145–46; Steven K. Green, *The Third Disestablishment: Church, State, and American Culture, 1940–1975* (New York, 2019), 255–73.

<sup>16</sup> Dierenfield, *The Battle over School Prayer*, 153–54.

congressional district contained the school district sued in *Engel* over school prayer, took up the issue and proposed a constitutional amendment, the Becker Amendment, to overturn the *Engel* decision. In 1964, the House Judiciary committee received a million signatures and more mail on the school prayer amendment than on any other topic. Yet despite widespread support, the Becker Amendment was successfully killed in committee, thanks to organized opposition from liberal Protestant and Jewish groups.<sup>17</sup>

One of the biggest reasons for the failure of the Becker Amendment was President John F. Kennedy. Having already argued for a privatized version of American religion in his 1960 Houston speech, Kennedy unsurprisingly voiced support for the *Engel* decision and noted that it was important to “support the Supreme Court decisions, even when we may not agree with them.” He then told Americans an easy solution to the Supreme Court’s decision was to pray “a good deal more at home and attend our churches with a good deal more fidelity.” As Jonathan Herzog has noted, Kennedy’s “was an argument for the reprivatization of spirituality.”<sup>18</sup>

What is most strange about the aftermath of the *Engel* and *Abington* decisions is both how swiftly the opposition to the decisions dissipated and how the budding conservative movement, now represented by Barry Goldwater, failed to take up these cases and use them for political advantage. (Republican Senator Everett Dirksen did briefly bring up the school prayer amendment in 1966, but it failed in a floor vote in the Senate.) Barry Goldwater had opposed the *Engel* decision in 1962, writing in support of Justice Potter Stewart’s dissent, and he lent his name in support of the Becker Amendment, but had done little else to back the cause.

There was little attempt to turn the court’s school prayer decision into a political issue in the 1964 campaign. Conservatives would instead, throughout the 1960s, turn the Warren Court’s “activism” into a political issue, rolling in not just the cases dealing with religion in schools but also law enforcement decisions, obscenity decisions, and the privacy issue in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965). The 1964 Republican platform did include a plank lightly touching on

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 181–82. On evangelicals and the Becker Amendment, see Steven K. Green, “Evangelicals and the Becker Amendment: A Lesson in Church-State Moderation,” *Journal of Church and State* 33 (Summer 1991): 541–67.

<sup>18</sup> Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 187–89; Dierenfield, *The Battle over School Prayer*, 149–50.

the *Engel* decision. It pledged support for “a Constitutional amendment permitting those individuals and groups who choose to do so to exercise their religion freely in public places, provided religious exercises are not prepared or prescribed by the state or political subdivision thereof and no person’s participation therein is coerced, thus preserving the traditional separation of church and state.” While on the surface, it seemed that Republicans were backing a constitutional amendment such as the Becker Amendment to overturn the *Engel* decision, as Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* noted, the last few words of the plank “seemed to some observers to make the proposal meaningless . . . the plank merely stated what the law already allows.” In reality, the 1964 Republican platform did not come out in favor of the Becker Amendment or an outright overturn of the *Engel* decision. In fact, the words “provided religious exercises are not prepared or prescribed by the state or political subdivision thereof” seem to imply that the Republicans did not actually support prayer in public schools.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to the 1960 presidential race, where religion took center stage as Protestants questioned the legitimacy of a Catholic president and Kennedy was forced to respond, religion was almost completely absent from the 1964 campaign. That fact seems odd given that Goldwater was half-Jewish and his running mate, upstate New York congressman William Miller, was Catholic. Neither Goldwater nor Miller sought to use their religious backgrounds for political gain. Yet considering that just four years earlier the nation was in the throes of a debate over the role of religion in politics, the relative lack of attention given to their religious backgrounds is interesting. Miller’s Catholicism did not seem to turn off conservative evangelicals and liberal Protestants had plenty of other criticisms of the Goldwater-Miller ticket to bother bringing out the Catholic issue. Perhaps the long-shot nature of the Goldwater campaign meant that those who might have been tempted to inject religious criticisms in the race chose to refrain. For Miller, his Catholic faith did not ensure broad Catholic support. When Miller, a Notre Dame graduate, returned to the campus in the fall of 1964, he received at best a lukewarm greeting from the administration and student body.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> “GOP Drafts Goldwater Planks,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1964, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> On William Miller and Notre Dame, see Wilson D. Miscamble, *American Priest: The*

Perhaps Goldwater had given his critics plenty of ammunition that they did not need to raise questions about his religion or that of his running mate. Criticism of Goldwater's "extremism" centered on his views of the Cold War and domestic policy, not his religion. In a telling move, two of the leaders of the postwar "spiritual-industrial complex" quietly backed President Lyndon Johnson over Goldwater in the 1964 campaign. Evangelicals may have supported Goldwater—Billy Graham received over one million telegrams from fellow evangelicals asking him to support Goldwater—but at the end of the day, according to Graham biographer Grant Wacker, "Graham effectively sat that one out, but he left little doubt that he favored his friend from Texas." New York's Catholic archbishop Francis Cardinal Spellman, a leading anti-communist voice for two decades, quietly let it be known that he was not for Goldwater and "thought very highly" of LBJ. Spellman accepted a private meeting with Goldwater but refused any photos after the meeting and did not invite Goldwater to speak at the annual Al Smith Dinner, a leading venue for national political figures. Spellman's power was waning and Graham's was ascending, but neither figure saw much appeal in Goldwater and their support for Johnson was tied to their support for the Vietnam War. (Although the lack of an invitation was certainly a snub, presidential-year invitations to the Al Smith Dinner had not yet become institutionalized. The 1960 campaign had been the only previous year where both presidential candidates spoke at the dinner.)<sup>21</sup>

Andrew Preston, in his history of the uses of religion in America's war and diplomacy, notes: "The religious rhetoric of Kennedy and Johnson marked a subtle but significant change . . . more ambivalent, less comfortable in the absolute certainties of faith." Their tones were humanistic and secular and reflected an America that was "both increasingly secular and pluralistic." Many average Americans continued to see the world shaped by religion, but they would not view those ideas in words that came from their political leaders. As Preston notes, "neither Kennedy nor Johnson

*Ambitious Life and Conflicted Legacy of Notre Dame's Father Ted Hesburgh* (New York, 2019), 264–65.

<sup>21</sup> Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014), 210–11. On Spellman's view of the 1964 campaign, see Telephone conversation #4909, sound recording, LBJ and Robert Wagner, 8/13/1964, 5:15PM, Recordings and Transcripts of Telephone Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, <https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/tel-04909> (accessed June 19, 2019).

really knew what to make of the religious changes of the 1960s, much less what to do with them.” The same can be said for Goldwater and the rise of the new conservatism. Even more than Kennedy and Johnson, Goldwater refused to frame issues of foreign policy around religious themes, even though many of his supporters came from conservative evangelical and Catholic backgrounds.<sup>22</sup>

The *Engel* and *Abington* decisions were significant, in the words of Jonathan Herzog, in terms of halting “the march down the road of sacralization.” “Public schools,” Herzog writes, “once considered a major battleground in America’s holy war, were rendered spiritually neutral.” The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and its allies, some of whom were in liberal Protestant churches, had struck a blow for a stricter wall of separation between church and state. The decisions, continues Herzog, “permanently altered other critical components of 1950s sacralization,” including a religiously based “character-guidance” program developed for the U.S. military in the 1950s.<sup>23</sup>

But there were more than just Supreme Court decisions driving the trend. Central to the sacralization of Cold War efforts was the role of American Catholics. The reforms of the Second Vatican Council tempered Catholics’ participation in the spiritual-industrial complex. Although these reforms were designed to throw the doors of the church open in order to engage with the broader society, it also led to a re-appraisal of Catholic leadership. Cardinal Spellman remained a staunch supporter of the Vietnam War until his death in 1967, but Pope Paul VI visited New York in 1965 and gave a speech at the United Nations where he declared: “No more war. Never again.” In 1968, Catholic bishops began to question American involvement in Vietnam and by 1971 the bishops argued that the war no longer met the church’s threshold for a “just war.” By the mid-1960s, the church, “once the backbone of American anticommunism,” according to Richard Gid Powers, tempered its staunch anti-communism, foreshadowing policies of détente and “Ostpolitik.” Meanwhile, weekly Catholic Church attendance began to fall from its 1955 high of 75 percent to 67 percent in 1965, a downward trend that has continued to 2018.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 502, 519.

<sup>23</sup> Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 189.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Warner, *Changing Witness: Catholic Bishops and Public Policy, 1917–1994* (Washington, D.C., 1995), 91–93; Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American*

Within Protestantism, a growing split between mainline liberals and evangelicals also helped drive the secularization of American political culture. As evangelicals became more politically active in the Republican Party and more comfortable framing their ideology with religious rhetoric, liberal Protestants began to decline in influence and increasingly made common cause with the Democratic Party and with more secular groups like the ACLU, which sought to tighten the separation of church and state.

The “spiritual-industrial complex” emphasized a broader, inter-sectarian religiosity, one that could hopefully unite a pluralistic country in a battle against communism. That coalition had frayed by the early 1960s. Political leaders like John F. Kennedy and Barry Goldwater, already predisposed toward skepticism about overt religious displays in public life, channeled that ambivalence in their public statements. Yet religion did not disappear from American life. The civil rights movement was often led by Christian ministers who wrapped their appeals around notions like natural law and racial justice rooted in Christianity. Catholics, whether radicals like the Berrigan brothers or mainstream politicians like Bobby Kennedy and Gene McCarthy, rooted their opposition to the Vietnam War in their religious beliefs. On the other side, evangelical Christians and conservative Catholics had more influence in the Republican Party and spoke out on social and moral issues. The civic religion of the early postwar period, broadly ecumenical and Judeo-Christian, was in tatters by the late 1960s. What followed was a more polarized religious rhetoric less able to unite a pluralistic nation as each side of the ideological divide made use of religious rhetoric to bolster their specific partisan claims.



In his later years, Goldwater criticized the Moral Majority and the Christian Right. He famously said once that he thought “Every good Christian ought to kick [Jerry] Falwell right in the ass.” He believed that “one of the most dangerous trends in this country” was “clergy engaged in a heavy-handed, continuing attempt to use

*Anticommunism* (New York, 1995), 51; Lydia Saad, “Catholics’ Church Attendance Resumes Downward Slide,” Gallup, April 9, 2018, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/232226/church-attendance-among-catholics-resumes-downward-slide.aspx> (accessed June 19, 2019).

political means to obtain moral ends—and vice versa.” He excoriated Falwell and evangelical preachers, as well as the Religious Left, such as Jesse Jackson and the National Council of Churches. He condemned the National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ 1980s pastorals criticizing Reagan’s foreign policy and economic policies. The behavior of the Catholic bishops, he argued, went against “the constitutional spirit of our government and people by merging religion and politics.” His libertarian instincts led him to dissent from Republican social issues such as abortion and gay rights.<sup>25</sup>

Goldwater mostly ignored the religious and spiritual dimension of the early Cold War. While Goldwater was correct that religion had become politicized by the 1980s, the roots of the “spiritual-industrial complex” that undergirded America’s policy of containing Soviet communism was bipartisan and far-reaching. Of course, America was undergoing a religious revival after World War Two, one that had dissipated by the 1970s. Ronald Reagan himself restarted the Cold War in the early 1980s, moving beyond both the post-Vietnam malaise and *détente*. It was no coincidence that his famous 1983 “evil empire” speech was given before a large crowd at the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando. Reagan sacralized America’s foreign policy in ways that had not been seen since the 1950s. He told his evangelical crowd: “While America’s military strength is important, let me add here that I’ve always maintained that the struggle now going on for the world will never be decided by bombs or rockets, by armies or military might. The real crisis we face today is a spiritual one; at root, it is a test of moral will and faith.” He went on to quote Whittaker Chambers who believed that the West could only challenge communism “provided that its faith in God and the freedom He enjoins is as great as communism’s faith in Man.”

Although Reagan and Goldwater shared a deep commitment to anti-communism and belief in the use of America’s military to contain it, Goldwater would have never been comfortable framing his views in that way. When examining Goldwater and the 1964 campaign, what is most interesting is the absence of religious ideas and imagery. For Goldwater, the anti-communist hawk, the Cold War was a decidedly secular affair. His discussions of the Cold War and communism were almost completely shorn of any kind of

<sup>25</sup> Goldwater with Casserly, *Goldwater*, 385–86.



talk about religious faith or atheistic communism. The shift from just a few years earlier during the Eisenhower administration was stark. If Kennedy had secularized the Democratic response to the Cold War, Goldwater could be said to have done the same on the Republican side. Not until Reagan would such rhetoric be revived.

On the domestic front, despite the controversial Supreme Court decisions on school prayer in 1963, Goldwater was at best ambivalent about opposing the *Engel* decision and made no real attempt to turn popular opposition to the ruling to his advantage in the presidential campaign. The *Engel* decision had been hugely unpopular when decided, yet neither Goldwater nor his conservative allies were able to turn such opposition to the school prayer decision to their political advantage in 1964. The Republican platform that year proclaimed itself in favor of the free exercise of religion, but a close reading of the plank showed that it did not come out against the *Engel* decision.

Scholars have successfully shown how central to the early Cold War religious rhetoric was to the battle to contain communism. America was in the throes of an easily identifiable religious revival. Yet such a revival was short-lived. By the early 1960s, public pronouncements by elected officials with religious overtones declined. Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon instead crafted their foreign policy pronouncements and ideals in almost completely secular tones.

Where scholars have been less successful is in explaining why the spiritual-industrial complex declined and faded from public rhetoric so quickly. How did a movement that began with FDR's use of religious rhetoric to frame America's wartime goals in the 1940s and then continued with the Truman and Eisenhower administrations suddenly die out?

Sometimes in history, what is omitted is just as important as what is said and done. Looking at Barry Goldwater's rise in the early 1960s to the GOP presidential nomination, we see a new conservatism that for a time largely avoided religious rhetoric. It was a conservatism geared toward individual liberty and in opposition to encroachments of the federal government. It would not be until the 1970s, with *Roe v. Wade* and the battles over abortion and the rise of a more politically engaged evangelical Christianity that conservatism would re-engage matters of faith and politics. But by this time, in contrast to the late 1940s and 1950s, such rhetoric

would become politicized in the “culture war” battles of the 1980s and beyond.

Understanding, as do many recent works of history, the centrality of religious themes during the early Cold War (as well as World War Two) helps us rethink the late 1940s and 1950s. But just as important as understanding how the “sacralization” of American civic culture burst onto the scene in the mid-twentieth century is to understand why that movement came to an abrupt halt by the early 1960s. Scholars have been less successful in explaining the reasons for that turn. The Goldwater years and the rise of the modern conservative movement arise during this gap between the brief, but potent, postwar “sacralization” and the emergence of the Christian Right. More research needs to be done to investigate how conservative Christians viewed Goldwater’s candidacy and why religiously based issues like school prayer did not fully energize religious voters to the extent that would occur a decade later with abortion. For now, when looking at Barry Goldwater and early conservative politics, religion was surely the dog that didn’t bark.